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An Illusion of Love: A Study of Male-Female Relationships in Four Roman Poets (Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius and Ovid), and of the Reflections of their Poetry in Visual Art

by

Margaret Marina Drummond

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *An Illusion of Love: A Study of Male-Female Relationships in Four Roman Poets (Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid), and of the Reflections of their Poetry in Visual Art* submitted by Margaret Marina Drummond in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Classical Studies.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature, as it deals not only with Roman poetry of the late Republic and the early Empire, but also with visual art. It is an investigation of what might be termed a dark streak in the art of this period: the failure of love relationships between men and women. The four poets studied here are Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid; it is the argument of this thesis that this dark streak appears, under different guises, in all four of these highly diverse poets. In each chapter the discussion of poetry is balanced by a discussion of visual art.

Chapter 1 contrasts the Invocation to Venus in Book I of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* to the savage denunciation of love and the female sex in Book IV. A discussion of Botticelli's visual masterpieces *La Primavera* and *Venus and Mars*, seemingly influenced by ancient texts, among them the *De Rerum Natura*, is used to elucidate Lucretius' text. Chapter 2 discusses Catullus' unique investigation of gender identity, *carmen* 63 (the Attis poem), its sources in mythology, and its influence on the decorative art unearthed in Campania. Chapter 3 deals with the troubled love relationship of the narrator figure created by Propertius in the corpus of his poetry and his fictional mistress Cynthia. The final part of the chapter links Propertius' highly visual love poetry with the Second and Third Styles of Campanian painting. Chapter 4 takes the argument of the thesis full circle: here Ovid's *Amores, Ars*

Amatoria, and *Remedia Amoris* are read as a Theatre of Love; from Lucretius angry outcries we have come to love as nothing but performance are also discussed, as well as theatrical motifs in contemporary Campanian painting.

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INTRODUCTION

That erotic love is a wholesome emotion is a concept largely foreign to classical Rome.

Robert E. Brown

Those of us who attempt to analyze ancient art, literary or visual, come to realize that in this pursuit there are no absolutes. No matter how painstaking and meticulous we may be as scholars, we will never attain to an objective truth. First, we must face the fact that literary or art criticism is not an exact science. We may find a given theoretical approach (such as reader-response or feminist criticism) useful in our work; nevertheless, theory is, at best, merely a convenient tool. As classical scholars we also encounter another all but insurmountable problem: centuries lie between us and the creators of the art that we study. While we undoubtedly share in a common humanity with them, the radical changes which have taken place in culture and society with the passage of centuries interpose a vast barrier between the ancient artist and the modern scholar. The era in which we live inevitably shapes our perceptions of art. We must recognize that we may never know what an artist actually intended centuries ago when he selected a certain word or painted a line or a shadow. We can only hope to understand his work in some small part, filtered through a kaleidoscope, as it were, of our own time, intellectual space, cultural background, and gender, as we strive to understand what the

ancient artist has created.

Thus this investigation of Roman poetry and art has been approached with the understanding that it will, inevitably, reflect a specific, if unintentional, intellectual bias, that of a late twentieth-century student of the ancient world. Furthermore, while this investigation does not claim to take a feminist approach, it is possible that the angle of vision from which it regards its material may be affected by being that of a woman reader of both the literary and the visual arts. It will be different from that of the nineteenth-century philologists who established Classics as a discipline (such as Robinson Ellis, whose meticulous and sensitive commentary on Catullus still remains essential reading for the serious student of Roman poetry). It will also be different from that of earlier twentieth-century academic classicists, not denizens of what may be styled our post-modern world (such as Cyril Bailey, without whose encyclopaedic work on the *De Rerum Natura* one cannot begin to approach the study of Lucretius).

Furthermore, as my investigation focuses to a large extent on the male lover figure, I realize that I may have a different perception of this figure from that of my contemporary male colleagues; I am, in a sense, looking at my material through the eyes of an outsider, a member of the opposite sex. Thus I may well interpret my material in a different manner. I do not, however, label my approach

feminist as such, since this term seems, at present, to be a vague one. What feminism means, or ought to mean, in academic terms remains a vexed question. In short, as I approach the material in this investigation, I am aware of the fact that my perceptions of the work of male artists, dead for centuries, may be affected, even if not consciously, by the fact that I live in a post-modern culture, and am a woman.

What I have attempted to do is study my material "as a woman," in the sense that Jonathan Culler uses this term.[1] Culler does not propose a sexist approach to criticism when he states: "...to read as a woman is to avoid reading as a man, to identify the specific defenses and distortions of male readings and provide correctives."[2] Clearly, open-minded critics of either sex are capable of this strategy, which amounts to nothing less than looking at old texts with new eyes, rather than necessarily following views sanctioned by the establishment. I believe that there is nothing to be lost, and much to be gained, by using this approach, in any investigation, especially within the field of Classics. Our area of scholarship has traditionally been conservative, and perhaps less open to new perspectives than some other disciplines within the Humanities (for example, Comparative Literature or Women's Studies).

My research takes an interdisciplinary approach as I am attempting to bridge a gap between poetry and visual art, two areas which are conventionally separated within the field of

Classics. While I chiefly focus on the male lover figure, and his difficult relationships with women, in Roman poetry of the late Republic and the Augustan period, I also attempt to examine near-contemporary visual art, and to interconnect it with the poetry under discussion. While it is difficult to establish a one-to-one, direct relationship between literary and visual art, this attempt is based on the assumption that, in any given historical era, these two forms of art ultimately derive from a common aesthetic. Twentieth-century scholars are in fact fortunate to have a reliable, if limited, access to visual art which relates to the period in which the poets discussed here lived, chiefly from the area around Mt. Vesuvius in Campania. The disastrous eruption of the volcano in A. D. 79 has been, ironically, a boon for the historian of Roman art.

In order to examine the male lover figure and his relationship to women, I have chosen to consider the work of four poets, Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius and Ovid. Lucretius may at first sight seem to be the "odd man out" in this quartet. While the other three poets are known for poetry which deals with love in its various permutations, Lucretius is known for his didactic poem *De Rerum Natura*, which attempts to explicate the scientific world-system proposed by the Greek philosopher Epicurus. His treatise on male sexuality in Book IV, however, seems to me crucial for understanding what the male lover figures in the work of the

other three poets seem to represent. His diatribe against love betrays not only a deep fear of the opposite sex, but also an anguish about the eternal and unbridgeable gap that, for him, seems to exist between men and women. Chapter 1 contrasts this dark and pessimistic passage from Book IV with the well-known and visually suggestive Invocation to Venus, which opens Book I of the work. It is a study in diametrical opposites. As I will argue in the following chapters, the pessimistic perception of gender relationships which is found in Lucretius' Book IV manifests itself also in the work of poets as diverse as Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid.

Chapter 2, a study of Catullus' *carmen* 63, first investigates the mythological and artistic background of the figures of Cybele and Attis who serve as protagonists therein, in order to show how unique a creation Catullus' poetic reworking of the Cybele/Attis myth is. This poem, like Lucretius' passage in Book IV, is a dark vision of male-female relationships. Attis, after castrating himself in honor of the goddess Cybele, lives to regret his act, only to be reduced to ignominious subservience by the cold and uncaring female divinity. Catullus, furthermore, uses the poem to explore the very idea of gender. Chapter 3 deals with the ambiguous relationship of Propertius' narrator/male lover and his dominating and powerful mistress Cynthia. Chapter 4 completes this investigation with a study of Ovid's three *amor* poems: the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris*.

These three poems are read as Ovid's Theatre of Love. Love, which Lucretius sees as a gaping wound and as the source of intense anguish for the male, has become merely a stage performance in Ovid; it does not, in fact, exist.

All four chapters of this investigation interconnect the poetry under discussion with visual art. Chapter 1, however, is to some degree unlike the following three chapters. It is impossible to find any contemporary visual evidence that reflects the diatribe against women in Lucretius' Book IV. The Invocation to Venus, however, is remarkably vivid in its visual suggestiveness. I have thus ventured here outside of the area of Classics, into Renaissance art. I have used two paintings by Sandro Botticelli, the *Primavera* and the *Venus and Mars*, merely to emphasize and to elucidate the vividly visual nature of the Invocation, not claiming that Lucretius' verses were the direct source of these paintings. There is, however, the possibility that Lucretius' verses may have played some part, even if minimal, in the creation of at least one of these paintings,[3] but this is an issue beyond the scope of this investigation.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal more directly with the relationship of poetry and contemporary visual art. Chapter 2 shows the influence which Catullus' poem 63 seems to have exerted, for a brief period, on visual representations of the Attis figure. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the visual nature of Propertius' poetry, and interconnects it with Campanian

wall painting. Chapter 4 once again uses the evidence of wall painting to show how Ovid and his contemporaries may well have perceived life as theatrical performance.

There is, of course, no single interpretation of any work of art; I hope, however, that my reading of the poets discussed in this investigation, as well as the interconnection of their work with visual art, will suggest an alternative way of looking at the artistic production of the late Republic and early Empire; that is, as products of a common aesthetic. Roman literature and visual art, though originating in a civilization long since gone, will remain alive as long as there are those of us who are willing to regard them as living entities, capable of being seen through new eyes and interpreted in new ways, rather than set in ancient dead stone. This is what I have aimed to do in this cross-disciplinary investigation.

1. See Jonathan Culler's essay,"Reading as a Woman," in *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, 1980).

2. Culler, p. 54.

3. Charles Dempsey has discussed the complex question of the influence of ancient texts in the creation of the *Primavera* in his extensive and groundbreaking study, *The Portrait of Love* (Princeton,1992).

CHAPTER 1: THE VIOLATED LOVER

> En fait, les Romains face aux femmes ont un grand sentiment d'inconnu, qui peut provoquer chez eux la panique.
>
> Florence DuPont

Lucretius' Invocation to Venus.

It may appear eccentric to begin the scrutiny of the figure of the male lover in the work of Roman poets of the late Republic and the Augustan era by examining two passages in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. Not only is this complex poem, an exposition of the Epicurean world-system, cast in epic rather than lyric form; it also deals with human love--and sex--only marginally. Yet the problematic picture of male sexuality that emerges from Lucretius' work is essential for understanding the male lover figure in the works of contemporary and near-contemporary love elegists. The Venus who appears in the *De Rerum Natura* casts her shadow, as it were, over the corpus of Roman love elegy; and the generic male caught in the throes of erotic passion, who is dissected in Lucretius' lines, becomes the surprising paradigm for the male lovers who posture, sigh and weep in the verses of the Roman love poetry which will be examined in the following chapters.

In order to understand what this crucial Lucretian Venus-figure represents, and how she affects the male lover, two

contrasting but complementary passages about the nature of Venus in the *De Rerum Natura* will be analyzed: Book I, 1-43, and Book IV, 1030-1286. While it is the long passage in Book IV which specifically deals with male erotic passion and sexuality, its impact cannot be fully understood without a prior examination of the Venus-figure in the well-known Invocation at the beginning of Book I:[1]

Aenadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:
te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
nam simul ac species patefactast verna diei
et reserata viget genitabilis aura favoni,
aeriae primum volucres te, diva, tuumque
significant initum perculsae corda tua vi.
inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula laeta
et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore
te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis
denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis
frondiferas domos avium camposque virentis
omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent.
quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam in luminis oras
exoritur, fit laetum nec amabile quicquam,
te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse
quos ego de natura rerum pangere conor
Memmiadae nostro, quem tu, dea, tempore in omni
omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus.
quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem.
effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
per mares ac terras omnis sopita quiescant.
nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
reicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris,
atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
pascit amore inhians in te, dea, visus,
eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.

hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
circumfusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem.
nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
talibus in rebus communi desse saluti.

Mother of Aeneas' sons, delight of gods and men,
nurturing Venus: you who, beneath the gliding signals
of the sky, fill and glorify the ship-bearing sea
and the grain-bearing lands, because through you
every race of living things is conceived,
and, risen forth, looks upon the light of the sun;
you, goddess, the winds flee from you,
the clouds of the sky flee from you and your advent.
For you, the intricate earth sends up flowers;
for you, the even plains of the sea smile;
for you, the becalmed sea gleams with diffuse light.
For as soon as the countenance of spring is revealed
and the unbarred fruitful breeze of Zephyr grows strong,
the airy birds first signal you, divine one,
and your entry, struck through the heart by your power;
then wild flocks leap through fertile meadows
and swim across swift brooks. Thus, captured
by your charm, all follow you with lust
wherever you proceed to lead them forth.
Next, throughout the seas and the mountains,
and the leafy homes of birds, and greening fields--
casting winsome love through all their hearts,
you cause their stock to propagate, each in its kind.
Because you alone govern the nature of things,
and because without you nothing rises forth
into the divine shores of light,
and nothing grows joyful and lovable,
I desire you as my ally in the verses I must write,
which I attempt to shape concerning the nature of things
for our dear scion of the Memmii,
whom you, goddess, wished to excel at all times,
outstanding in each enterprise.
Therefore, divine one, give a more enduring charm
to my words. Meanwhile, cause the wild works of war
to grow becalmed in sleep throughout the seas and lands.
For only you can give help to us mortals in quiet peace,
for Mavors, powerful in arms, rules the wild works of war--
he who often casts himself back upon your lap,
vanquished by the eternal wound of love;
and thus looking up, his smooth neck curved back,
he grazes with is eyes, avid with love,
gaping at you, goddess; and his breath hangs
upon your countenance as he lies there.
As you pour your sacred body round him, holy one,
from above, as he reclines, pour forth sweet words,

begging for calm peace, glorious one, for the Romans.
For we cannot act with level mind at this time
adverse for our fatherland; nor may the renowned son
of Memmius fail it in these matters of public good.

It is obvious that this passage represents something more than the customary address to a divinity at the beginning of an epic enterprise. Its length alone indicates that Lucretius is not merely bowing to convention; one need only recall, for example the brevity of Homer's invocations.[2] It would be more accurate to call these lines a Hymn to Venus. It has, in fact, been demonstrated that this passage follows the conventional form of ancient Greek hymns: praise of the divinity invoked (1-20); specific petitions (21-30); grounds for the petitions (31-40); and necessity for the petitions (41-42).[3] Since these lines, however, are so strikingly pictorial, and since this study makes an attempt to cross over the conventional boundaries set between poetry and visual art, they will be considered as a visual phenomenon in this chapter: a diptych, or double portrait of Venus.

Lucretius and Botticelli.

The Invocation to Venus consists of two distinct sections, which are the counterparts of two separate visual scenes: first, lines 1-28, and second, lines 29-42. Each scene represents a different aspect of Venus: the first side of the diptych shows Venus as *Genetrix*, the beneficent Creatress, placed in a spring setting; the second, Venus with

mars, God of War. To the student of European art history, these brief characterizations of the two scenes will be suggestive: they are likely to bring to mind two paintings by the Italian Renaissance painter, Sandro Botticelli (1444/45-1510): the familiar *Primavera* or *Allegory of Spring* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence), and the somewhat less well-known *Venus and Mars* (National Gallery, London).[4] This chapter will treat these two visual representations of Venus as parallel to the written text in order to help elucidate what the Venus figure represents in the Invocation.

It is, of course, true that Botticelli's paintings, a manifestation of the Florentine passion for the classical world, were executed centuries later. The Renaissance saw what it wanted to in the ancient world without necessarily fully understanding it, just as we do in the twentieth century; its angle of vision on Roman culture may be as oblique as our own. It is, nevertheless, likely that the Venus figure created by Lucretius in his Invocation seems to have had a part in inspiring two visual masterpieces by a great Renaissance artist, even if the vision of Venus in his paintings is affected by the tastes and perceptions of his own era.[5] Thus studying what Botticelli saw in the verses of Lucretius cannot help but reveal more tones, subtleties, and new facets in the diptych portrait of Venus to its modern reader/viewer.

That Botticelli knew Lucretius' work is not merely a

conjecture based on the internal evidence revealed within the paintings. During his entire career he was associated with the court circle of the Medici in Florence, one of the great centers of intellectual and artistic activity in fifteenth-century Europe.[6] Whether Botticelli actually read the poetry of Lucretius in the original is unknown, but as a member of a highly sophisticated intellectual and artistic milieu, he was undoubtedly literate and most likely had at least the rudiments of a humane education. Vasari in his *Lives of the Painters* calls him a *persona sofistica*, and states that on one occasion the artist accused a neighbor of holding "false Epicurean opinions".[7] While this anecdote may say more about the artist's character than his learning, it suggests that he was at least to some degree familiar with the ancients.

Even if Botticelli did not read Latin, he is very likely to have had access to Lucretius' verses indirectly through the works of his contemporary Angelo Ambrogini, known as Poliziano, a humanist scholar and poet who is known to have translated the works of Homer and Hesiod, among others, into Italian.[8] Like Botticelli, Poliziano was closely attached to the Medici circle: the Medici family acted as patrons to both at various times. Poliziano's epic poem *Giostra*, written in honor of a jousting tournament (1469) sponsored by Giuliano de Medici,[9] contains several loose translations or echoes of passages from the *De Rerum Natura;* note, for example, the English rendering of a passage from Stanza I, directly

relevant to this study:

> A realm where grace takes delight,
> Where all sensuality is behind Flora.
> Zephyr flies, and the green grass blossoms.[10]

This is undoubtedly based on Book V, lines 737-740:

> it ver et Venus, et Veneris praenuntius ante
> pennatus graditur, Zephyri vestigia propter
> Flora, quibus mater praespargens ante viai
> cunctua coloribus egregiis et odoribus opplet.
>
> Spring comes, and Venus, and the winged messenger
> of Venus steps ahead; near the tracks of Zephyr
> mother Flora fills everything
> with marvelous colors and scents,
> scattering them ahead in their path.

As it will be argued below, this passage is in fact conflated with the first part of the Invocation to create Botticelli's own visual version of the Lucretian Venus Genetrix, the Creatress figure.

The Nature of Lucretius' Venus in the Invocation

Who or what, then, is the Venus of the Invocation, and what does she represent? Cyril Bailey, the foremost authority on Lucretius, has noted that, on purely logical grounds, the Venus of Book I is an incongruous figure in the *De Rerum Natura;* Lucretius is invoking a Goddess whose immanence he does snot believe in.[11] Indeed one of the aims of the poet's exposition of Epicurus' philosophy is to dispel superstition and fear of the gods;[12] while, as Lucretius suggests, they may have some kind of existence somewhere in the remote interstices of the universe, they are utterly unconcerned with

the affairs of this earth.

> enim per se divum natura necessest
> immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur
> semota ab nostris rebus seiuncta longe.
> nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis
> ipse suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri
> nec bene promeritis capitur nec tangitur ira.
>
> For of necessity, the whole nature of gods
> enjoys immortal life in the greatest peace,
> removed from our affairs, and far apart from us.
> For free from all pain, free from danger,
> powerful in its own resources,
> it is neither taken by merit nor touched with wrath.[13]

One must, however, keep in mind that Lucretius is not just the proponent and explicator of a rational philosophical system, but also, first and foremost, a poet. Poetry does not move in the same realms as logic; and the logical incongruity perceived by Bailey does not affect the literary force or beauty of the Invocation. In fact, Bailey himself admits this when he notes that Lucretius' poetry tends to work less by syllogistic argument than by creating visual imagery;[14] and, as it will be demonstrated, the visual impact of the Invocation is considerable.

Another Lucretian scholar, E. E. Sikes, has suggested that the Venus of the Invocation is simply an allegorical representation for the complex *Natura* which Lucretius is attempting to elucidate for the aristocrat Memmius to whom the poem is addressed.[15] He suggests that Nature may be cast as Venus as a flattering reference to the *gens* of the Memmii, who regarded the goddess as their patron deity.[16] While this may well be true, the figure that Lucretius has created is far

more than that; the Venus of the Invocation is vibrantly alive in a passage of poetry of great power and beauty. As one Lucretian critic has put it:

> Anyone who has read these lines aloud in the lecture-room and watched their impact on his audience knows that the poetry has too much vitality for mere allegory....Venus here is no mere symbol; she is intensely alive.[17]

Indeed, the Invocation seems to have had an impact on all kinds of readers--or hearers--even during or shortly after the poet's lifetime. An unknown contemporary or near-contemporary of Lucretius--of equally unknown literary tastes--was struck deeply enough by its first words, *Aeneadum genetrix*, to immortalize them in a *graffito* on a wall of the Basilica at Pompeii.[18] On the other end of the cultural spectrum, Cicero, unquestionably a cultivated man who may have known Lucretius personally, also seems to have appreciated his work. Unfortunately, however, it is not clear what passage or passages he had in mind when he wrote to his brother Quintus in 54 B.C.: "Lucretii poemata ut scribis ita sunt multis ingenii luminibus multae tamen artis" (As you say, the poems of Lucretius thus show outstanding inborn talent, and yet much skill).[19] Cicero's use of the plural noun *poemata* remains tantalizing for the modern reader; one wonders if he is merely referring to sections or passages of the *De Rerum Natura*, or possibly to other works from the poet's hand, lost to posterity.

Not long after the poet's death Ovid, too, paid poetic homage to he Venus of the Invocation in Book IV of the *Fasti*;

the verbal echoes from Lucretius are unmistakable:

> illa quidem totum dignissima temperat orbem;
> illa tenet nullo regna minora deo,
> iuraque dat caelo, terrae, natalibus undis,
> perque suos initus continet omne genus.
> illa deos omnes (longum est numerare) creavit:
> illa satis causas arboribusque dedit:
> illa rudes animos hominum contraxit in unum
> et docuit iungi cum pare quemque sua.
> quid genus omne creat volucrum, nisi blanda voluptas?
> nec coeant pecudes, si levis absit amor. (91-100)
>
> Indeed, she most worthily governs the whole orb;
> she holds a domain second to no divinity,
> and she gives laws to heaven, to earth, and to her natal waves;
> and, with her entry, controls every living thing.
> She has created all the gods (it would be lengthy to list them);
> she has given purpose to seedlings and trees;
> she has brought together in accord the rude minds of men,
> and has taught each to join with an equal mate.
> What has brought into being every kind of bird,
> if not winsome pleasure?
> Nor do flocks copulate if gentle love is absent.

This passage is obviously a graceful tribute to the portrait of Venus in Cretius' Invocation; no knowledgable contemporary reader of the *Fasti* could have missed the resonance of *initus* (94) and, especially, *blanda voluptas* (99).

The Invocation and the *Primavera*.

This study will now examine the Invocation itself to determine how Venus is represented in both sides of the diptych that Lucretius has created, first by looking at Lucretius' verses themselves, and then at the two relevant Botticelli canvases. The first side of the diptych corresponds to lines 1-26, Venus in a spring landscape. In

the very first lines it is evident that the figure of the Goddess represents something more than mere abstraction or allegory. While the first epithet by which she is addressed, *genetrix* (1), is purely conventional,[20] it is given an unexpected shape through being modified by the sonorous genitive plural *Aeneadum*, which suggests links to the legendary past of Rome: possibly a graceful political bow to the noble Memmius for whom the poet is writing.[21] *Alma* (2), too, is a stock epithet for Venus, equally conventional, as Cyril Bailey has pointed out.[22] These epithets, however, are juxtaposed with *hominum divumque voluptas* (1), "the delight of men and gods": it is already evident from the start that this Venus does not belong in the realm of pure abstraction, but represents something more complex.

It becomes clear by lines 2-4 that she is a very powerful entity: she governs not only the realm of the earth, but the sky and the seas as well (caeli subter labentia signa/quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis/ concelebras...). It is likely that Lucretius, a learned poet, is here also connecting the Venus figure to her rich and complex Greek mythological background by echoing the Homeric *Hymn to Aprhodite*:

> Μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε ἔργα πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης,
> Κύπριδος, ἥτε θεοῖσιν ἐπὶ γλυκὺν ἵμερον ὦρσε
> καί τ' ἐδαμάσσατο φῦλα καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων
> οἰωνούς τε διιπετέας θηρία πάντα,
> ἠμὲν ὅσ' ἤπειρος πολλὰ τρέφει ἠδ' ὅσα πόντος·
> πᾶσιν δ' ἔργα μέμηλεν ἐυστεφάνου Κυθερείης.

Muse, tell me the deeds of all-golden Aphrodite,
the Cyprian, who has poured sweet yearning
upon the gods, and has subdued the throngs
of men subject to death, and the double-winged birds,
and all the many creatures, those that the dry land
nourishes, as well as the sea;
the works of lovely-wreathed Cytherea
encompass them all.[23]

Her figure also recalls Hesiod's Hecate in the *Theogony*: a benign goddess whose realm is not limited to a single domain, but who has been granted a triple power over sky, sea and land by Zeus, and is thus greatly honored by gods and mortals both:

...πόρεν δέ οἱ ἀγλαὰ δῶρα,
μοῖραν ἔχειν γαίης τε καὶ ἀτρυγέτοιο θαλάσσης.
ἣ δὲ καὶ ἀστερόεντος ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἔμμορε τιμῆς
ἀθανάτοις τε θεοῖσι τετιμένη ἐστὶ μάλιστα.

He gave her glorious gifts: a share in the earth
and in the barren sea; and she also received
the starry sky; and she is honored above all
by the deathless gods.[24]

There are also suggestions of the Persephone/Demeter dyad in her figure. The advent of Venus, like Persephone's seasonal ascent from the Underworld, signals the return of Spring, warmth and nascent life. At the same time, the fecundity of plant (tibi suavis daedala tellus/summitit flores, 6-7) and especially animal life (efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent, 20) recall Demeter in the joyful season of their reunion in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.[25]

...οὐδ' ἀπίθησεν ἐϋστέφανος Δημήτηρ,
αἶψα δὲ καρπὸν ἀνῆκεν ἀρουράων ἐριβώλων.
πᾶσα δὲ φύλλοισίν τε καὶ ἄνθεσιν εὐρεῖα χθὼν
ἔβρισ'.

...nor did garlanded Demeter disobey, but forthwith
brought forth fruit from the rich-clodded fields,

and the whole wide earth was laden with leaves and flowers.

Yet above and beyond the suggestive mythological resonances, Venus is represented as an active being--or force--which causes every form of life that exists in the natural world to seek instinctive renewal of its species through propagation. The first side of the Venus diptych is a tableau teeming with sexual energy. From the beginning of the passage, the reader sees even what are normally conceived of as inanimate aspects of nature taking an active part in a kind of Dance of Life. Constellations glide (labentia signa, 2), the sea carries ships (mare navigerum, 3), the earth bears grain (terras frugiferentis, 3). Lucretius' use of the compound adjectives in the latter two instances is particularly effective in suggesting latent activity in two realms which are capable of nurturing life, though themselves inanimate.[26]

Everything in this world seems to be set into speeded-up motion. In turn, the winds and clouds flee (5), the earth pushes up flowers (5), even the becalmed sky takes on the act of glowing (9). Day is personified by being granted a spring face (species patefactast verna diei, 10); so is the great level sea which smiles at the Goddess (tibi rident aequora ponti, 8); the spring breeze is, like a human prisoner, unlocked (et reserata viget genitabilis aura favoni, 11). The whole of the animal kingdom is rapidly cast into the beginning of the life-cycle; swiftly and in turn living creatures are

conceived and look upon the rising sun (per te quoniam genus omne animantum/concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis, 4-5).

The intensity of the sexual instinct aroused in birds is beautifully rendered by "perculsae corda tua vi" (struck through the heart by your force/violence, 13). When describing the behaviour of animals at the advent of Venus, the poet accomplishes something even more striking by the juxtaposition of *ferae pecudes* (wild flocks, 14), a seeming oxymoron which suggests the wild force of the primeval urge to copulate that remains in members of the animal kingdom long tamed by man.[27] Yet the birds and the beasts do not mate in blind lust merely to propagate their species; they are captured by delight (*capta lepore*, 15), and their love, *amor*, is *blandus*, an adjective that suggests not only fondness, charm, and flattery, but also sexuality. In short, Venus doe snot accomplish her work through force alone, but also by giving joy and pleasure to all creatures under her rule.

What this side of the Venus diptych presents for the modern reader familiar with the Christian tradition is a vision of pre-lapsarian Eden before the advent of Man. This world has not yet been polluted by suffering, sorrow and death. This scene is frozen in a moment of time, a moment of promises and fecund beginnings. Its spirit is beautifully rendered in Botticelli's *Primavera*, a painting that seems to have a universal appeal to viewers ranging from children to trained art historians, perhaps because it captures another

vision of an unattainable pre-lapsarian beauty which human beings instinctually seek in their flawed world and transitory lives.

It is obvious, in looking at the *Primavera*, that Botticelli does not accurately depict the first side of the Venus diptych as it appears in the Invocation: a painter, of course, does not use the same "language" or sign system as a poet. Furthermore, the artist is not creating an illustration for Lucretius' text, or even for Poliziano's *Giostra*, but rather setting down an original vision and creating a work of art in its own right.[28] Unlike Lucretius' primeval vision of a paradise without man, the *Primavera* teems with representations of human figures. What Botticelli';s allegorical intent may actually have been when he created the canvas is impossible to know; there is wide disagreement about the interpretation of the painting among art historians, an issue that lies beyond the scope of this study.[29] What I propose to do here is to "read" this canvas "as a woman,"[30] from my own oblique angle.

From a classicist's viewpoint the canvas appears to be a conflation of several motifs from ancient literature. The grouping on the right seems to have been suggested by the brief passage about the coming of Spring in *De Rerum Natura* V, 736-739, reworked by Poliziano, which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter.[31] The puff-cheeked air-borne figure on the extreme right is apparently Zephyr; the startled female

figure in transparent drapery whom he is grasping must be the nymph Chloris and the flower-bedecked woman seems to be Flora, into whom she is transformed.[32]

The three Graces, all but nude, moving in a circular dance with their hands joined suggest two similar passages from the Spring odes of Horace: "iunctaque Nymphis, Gratiae decentes/alterno terram quatiunt pede" (together with the Nymphs, the comely Graces strike the ground with each foot in turn, I.4, 6-7); and "gratia cum Nymphis geminisque sororibus/audet ducere nuda choros" (the nude Grace with the Nymphs and her twin sisters dares to lead the choral dances, IV.7, 5-6)). The figure of Hermes/Mercury on the far left, possibly an idealized representation of Giuliano de Medici,[33] is also connected with Spring; the month of May is named for his mother Maia.[34] It is, however, the representation of Venus with which this study is chiefly concerned. She is the central figure and the focal point of the painting: all the action in the canvas literally revolves around her. She seems to step straight from Lucretius' Invocation rather than from the brief passage from Book V mentioned above. The fecundity of nature that she brings into being at her entry is suggested by the lush vegetation that serves as a backdrop to all the mythical figures. Although it is Spring, the richly verdant trees, the *frondiferae domus avium* (17), bear not only blooms but also golden oranges already fully ripe, in almost an excess of richness. The lush greenery beneath the feet of the

figures is full of a multitude of flowers.[35] Furthermore, the physical energy of Lucretius' Spring world seeking to renew itself is conveyed by the movement and activity of all the figures on the canvas: the Hermes/Mercury figure reaches and gazes upward, the Graces dance in a circular motion, Flora strides gracefully forward, the startled figure of Spring moves diagonally away from the swooping Zephyr who is about to puff out his cheeks.

The figure of Venus herself, however, is the fixed still-point in the composition. Is it not likely that, by positioning her in the center of the painting, the artist is suggesting that she is the center around which all nature turns? If we regard Botticelli's Venus in this light, her figure comes very close indeed to the Venus of Lucretius in the Invocation. It is also important to look at the actual placement of her figure on the canvas. She stands slightly above the other figures. One could say that Botticelli was experimenting with the problems of placement of figures on a large canvas; it seems more likely, however, that the artist was not only trying to place Venus slightly higher than the other figures, as would befit a very powerful divinity, but also to convey a slight remoteness from them.[36]

This is borne out by the expression on her lovely but impassive countenance, gazing calmly out from the painting beyond the figures moving about her, and yet not at the viewer, but rather even beyond him toward a point somewhere in

space. Her remoteness and calm suggest that she is not a part of the turmoil and movement of life, but rather a being or a force from a realm above and beyond it. This, too, parallels Lucretius' perception of the nature of divinity as "semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe" (remote, and separated by far from our affairs, I, 46). Thus Botticelli, has, in the *Primavera* canvas, suggested all the beauty, fecundity, and divine nature of Venus that is found in the Invocation.

The Invocation and *Venus and Mars*.

The second side of the Venus diptych corresponds to lines 29-43 of the Invocation, a prayer to the goddess for peace in Rome. Here Venus is represented with the god of war Mars as her lover, "powerful in arms" and author of the "wild works of warfare"[37] (armipotens, 33; belli fera moenera, 32). The themes of the two seemingly diverse sides of the diptych are in fact closely related: in the first side, Venus is shown as *Genetrix*, the Creatress of life; in the second, the Creatress is juxtaposed with the figure of the Destroyer of life. Lucretius' use of the archaic form of the war-god's name, Mavors (30), has a powerful effect; it may be used not only for stylistic reasons for metrical convenience. Visually Mavors contains *mors*, the Latin word for death;[38] no doubt Lucretius' audience would also have been sensitive to the auditory pun when his verses were declaimed. On an

allegorical level, then, this side of the diptych seems to set forth a vision of the eternal dyad of opposites that encompass existence: peace/strife; life/death; creation/destruction.

Just like the Venus figure that Lucretius has created in the first half of the diptych, the Venus and Mars of this scene, too, are alive and vivid, in a tableau charged with sexual energy as intense as that of the vision of the world in Spring, albeit different in kind. The depiction of Mars lying in the lap of Venus is not surprising in itself; the tradition of the two divinities as sexual partners goes back to the well-known scene in Homer's *Odyssey*[39], where they are caught out as illicit lovers. What is remarkable here is the vivid visual depiction, understated yet unmistakeable, of sexual passion spent. If the first side of the diptych depicts sexuality in its promising beginnings, the second one shows it at its ending.

Lucretius' verbal tableau shows Mavors the death-dealer reclining, utterly exhausted, on the breast, or possibly in the lap of Venus: the noun *gremium* (33) suggests, ambiguously, either position. He lies supine, gaping inelegantly, it would seem, with an open-mouthed stare. This figure grazes (*pascit*, 36), like an animal, on Venus' face with his eyes. The mention of his breath which hangs on Venus' mouth (*tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore*, 37) further strengthens the impression of post-coital exhaustion.

The positioning of the two divinities is significant.

Venus the Creatress is placed above the recumbent Destroyer (*tuo recumbantem corpore sancto/ circumfusa super*, 38-39). In a positive sense, the poet seems to imply that the force of regenerative life may ultimately be stronger than the forces of destruction and death. Yet the scene is ambiguous. When we visualize Venus and Mars as human figures, it is evident that the female in this scene dominates over the male by her physical placement above him; thus the male become the inferior and subservient partner in the couple.

The phrase *circumfusa super*, too, is problematic. In his invaluable translation of *De Rerum Natura*, Cyril Bailey pictures Venus as bending (down?) to embrace Mavors.[40] Literally--and awkwardly--translated, however, the perfect passive participle *circumfusa* "means" having been poured around. There is, then, the suggestion of Venus as a liquid entity, capable of engulfing, even possibly drowning, the exhausted male figure. Thus a disquieting, even faintly sinister note intrudes into the second half of the diptych: one begins to suspect that this lovely Venus figure may have a darker side.

The most revealing words in the second part of the Invocation appear in line 34: Mavors is described as *aeterno devictus vulnere amoris* (literally, "thoroughly defeated by the eternal wound of love.") This phrase takes the reader out of the zone of the Homeric vision, a comic account of the two divinities caught out in bed after fornication. In Lucretius'

lines the male figure is shown as defeated and suffering from a wound; the female is unhurt and whole, and by implication the victor. Sex has become a dangerous battleground, and it is the male who is vulnerable: another disturbing note enters the text. The jarring and unexpected image of wounds and battle is, in fact, a major connecting link between the representation of Venus in the diptych of the Invocation, and the transmogrified Venus of Book IV.

It is again revealing to scrutinize the visual representation created by Botticelli in order to gain more insight into Lucretius' lines. The *Venus and Mars* canvas is in fact much more directly connected with the Invocation than the *Primavera*. Once again, one must be mindful of the fact that the painter has not illustrated Lucretius' verses, but rather created an original work of art inspired by them. Botticelli has not placed Mars on Venus' breast or lap; the goddess is not bending (or "pouring herself") down from above. The two reclining figures, male and female are evenly placed, with heads at opposite sides of the picture, as if having come apart after the act of love: an evenly balanced composition. Furthermore, the artist has filled what might have been empty areas on the canvas with *putti* sporting around the recumbent mars, playing with the armor he has removed for making love.

At first sight, the canvas--like the corresponding lines of Lucretius--gives an impression of loveliness. Both deities are undeniably attractive; Venus wears a splendid white-and-

gold gown. The composition of the canvas is harmonious; even the *putti* seem to add a light-hearted touch. But as one scrutinizes the canvas more carefully, disquieting elements reveal themselves, just as in Lucretius' lines. Venus is depicted fully clothed; the nearly nude body of Mars, barely draped over his genitalia, appears vulnerable and exposed by contrast. The Mars figure bears more than a superficial resemblance to the Mercury figure in the *Primavera* canvas; it is possible that Giuliano de Medici may be depicted in both canvases, which were executed within a few years of each other.[41] But in comparison to the standing Mercury figure, who reaches and gazes upwards, his muscles delicately flexed in the movement, the body of Mars appears almost flaccid as he lies exhausted on the ground.

It is, however, the sleeping face of Mars which highlights, more than anything else, the key phrase "devictus vulnere amoris." Its expression conveys the utter exhaustion of post-coital sleep, the aftermath of *la petite mort*. There is a suggestion of something more disturbing for someone familiar with Botticelli's works. The slightly parted lips, with the teeth slightly visible, and the faintly shadowed paleness of the weary face strongly recall the expression on the countenance of the dead Christ in two religious paintings by the artist.[42] The subtle intimation of morbidity is heightened by the supine pale and nude torso, draped loosely over the genitalia. Thus, what starts as a representation of

la petite mort, sexual "death," acquires, for a twentieth-century viewer, the disturbing overtones of real death, the *mors* contained within the God's own name.

Furthermore, Mavors is not only *devictus*, totally defeated, but also appears somewhat ridiculous, mocked by the *putti* playing with his discarded armaments; one is about to deliver what is likely to be painful blast of sound with a conch shell right into the unsuspecting male figure's ear. The *putti* are a curious combination of the smooth-skinned infant *erotes* traditionally associated with Venus, and of shaggy goat-legged satyrs, suggestive of unbridled adult male sexuality. Allegorically, they may represent the lust of the sleeping God. The implication of their presence seems to be that this lust has defeated, if not unmanned him, leaving him utterly vulnerable; the God's death-bringing lance and splendid armor have, ironically, been turned into toys for infants.

At first glance this visual statement appears to be light-hearted mockery of this male figure, loser in the playground (or battle?) of sex. A closer look, however, reveals that the *putti* are anything but cute if mischievous little creatures. To a modern viewer of the canvas, their little horns and pointed ears inevitably suggest not only satyrs, but also devils, albeit little ones. An impression of nascent evil is conveyed by the surprisingly adult expressions on the infant faces of the grinning creatures. The *putto* at

the very center of the canvas, the tip of his tongue between his lips, has the knowing and lascivious look of an adult male with a great deal of sexual experience. The heavy face of the fat imp who is crawling through Mars' breastplate in the lower right corner of the painting is even more adult in its expression. His tongue protrudes even further between his parted lips the infantile features have the look of naked lust. The incongruity of the infant bodies with the adult sexuality manifest in their facial expressions is faintly disturbing.

A scrutiny of the vegetation that forms the background to the human figures is also revealing. While in the *Primavera* canvas even the natural background is full of life: the trees are aglow with orange fruit and white blossoms, and the ground is a carpet of floral profusion. In the *Venus and Mars* canvas, however, the trees bear no fruit or blossoms, there are no flowers on the ground, and the grass appears bristly. If in the *Primavera* canvas nature is more than abundant, here it is barren.

The figure of Venus herself is striking by any Western standards of beauty with her golden hair, delicate elongated hands and feet, long neck, and evenly-shaped oval face. Her facial features are harmonious: her forehead is smooth and high, her gray eyes are almond-shaped rather than round, her mouth small, her nose large with a bit of an uneven curve. At first sight she conveys an impression of grave serenity and

calm. The pagan Goddess of Love recalls some of the Christian madonnas in Botticelli's oeuvre, particularly the *Madonna of the Pomegranate* (Florence, Uffizi Gallery), both through her facial features and her air of serenity. The artist, moreover, has chosen to represent the Goddess of Love in virginal white; is the viewer, perhaps, being led to suspect a certain contradiction in the nature of this Venus? Can the viewer, perhaps, see this Venus as not only chaste but even sexually cold?

The expression on Venus' lovely face may give the answer to the question. The goddess appears to be looking in the direction of her sleeping lover, but on closer observation it becomes clear that her eyes are gazing almost abstractedly out of the canvas at a point in space beyond Mars. She betrays no interest in her partner; there is no tenderness in her gaze. Like the Venus in the *Primavera* she is remote--but here the remoteness becomes coldness. This female figure has been capable of the sexual act, but seems incapable of union in love.

Thus the study of Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* underscores the fact that the Venus of the second half of Lucretius' diptych is a darker, more ominous figure than the benign *Genetrix* of the first half. She foreshadows, in fact, the Venus of Lucretius' Book IV (1036-1287), whose nature this chapter will now try to define.

II. Sollicitatur id <in> nobis, quod diximus ante,
semen, adulta aetas cum primum roborat artus.
namque alias aliud res commovet atque lacessit;
ex homine humanum semen ciet una hominis vis,
quod simul atque suis eiectum sedibus exit,
per membra atque artus decedit corpore toto
in loca conveniens nervorum certa cietque
continuo partis genitalis corporis ipsas.
irritata tument loca semine fitque voluntas
eicere id quo se contendit dira lubido,
[incitat irritans loca turgida semine multo]
idque petit corpus, mens unde est saucia amore.
namque omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus et illam
emicat in partem sanguis unde icimur ictu,
et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor.
sic igitur Veneris qui telis accipit ictus,
sive puer membris muliebribus hunc iaculatur
seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem,
unde feritur, eo tendit gestitque coire
et iacere umorem in corpus de corpore ductum.
namque voluptatem praesagit muta cupido.
Haec Venus est nobis; hinc autemst nomen amoris,
hinc illaec primum Veneris dulcedinis in cor
stillavit gutta et successit frigida cura.
nam si abest quod ames, praesto simulacra tamen sunt
illius et nomen dulce obversatur ad auris.
sed fugitare decet simulacra et pabula amoris
absterrere sibi atque alio convertere mentem
et iacere umorem collectum in corpora quaeque
nec retinere, semel conversum unius amore,
et servare sibi curam certumque dolorem.
ulcus enim vivescit et inveterascit alendo
inque dies gliscit furor atque aerumna gravescit,
si non prima novis conturbes vulnera plagis
vulgivagaque vagus Venere ante recentia cures
aut alio possis animi traducere motus.
Nec Veneris fructu caret is qui vitat amorem,
sed potius quae sunt sine poena commoda sumit.
nam certe purast sanis magis inde voluptas
quam miseris. etenim potiundi in tempore ipso
fluctuat incertis erroribus ardor amantum
nec constat quid primum oculis manibusque fruantur.
quod petiere, premunt arte faciuntque dolorem
corporis et dentis inlidunt saepe labellis
osculaque adfligunt, quia non est pura voluptas
et stimuli subsunt qui instigant laedere id ipsum
quodcumque est, rabies unde illaec germina surgunt.
sed leviter poenas frangit Venus inter amorem

blandaque refrenat morsus admixta voluptas.

namque in eo spes est, unde est ardoris origo,
restingui quoque posse ab eodem corpore flammam.
quod fieri contra totum natura repugnat;
unaque res haec est, cuius quam plurima habemus,
tam magis ardescit dira cuppedine pectus.
nam cibus atque umor membris asumitur intus;
quae quoniam certas possunt obsidere partis,
hoc facile expletur laticum frugumque cupido.
ex hominis vero facie pulchro colore
nil datur in corpus praeter simulacra fruendum
tenvia; quae vento spes raptat saepe misella.
ut bibere in somnis sitiens cum quaerit et umor
non datur, ardorem qui membris stinguere possit,
sed laticum simulacra petit frustraque laborat
in medio sitit torrenti flumine potans,
sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis
nec satiare queunt spectando corpora coram
nec manibus quicquam teneris abradere membris
possunt errantes incerti corpore toto.
denique cum membris collatis flore fruuntur
aetatis, iam cum praesagit gaudia corpus
atque in eost Venus ut muliebria conserat arva,
adfigunt avide corpus iunguntque salivas
oris et inspirant pressantes dentibus ora,
nequiquam, quoniam nil inde abradere possunt
nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto;
nam facere interdum velle et certare videntur:
usque adeo cupide in Veneris compagibus haerent,
membra voluptatis dum vi labefacta liquescunt.
tandem ubi se erupit nervis collecta cupido,
parva fit ardoris violenti pausa parumper.
inde redit rabies eadem et furor revisit,
cum sibi qui cupiant ipsi contingere quaerunt,
nec reperire malum id possunt quae machina vincat:
usque adeo incerti tabescunt vulnere caeco.
    Adde quod absumunt viris pereuntque labore,
adde quod alterius sub nutu degitur aetas.
labitur interea res et Babylonica fiunt,
languent officia atque aegrotat fama vacillans.
unguenta et pulchra in pedibus Sicyonia rident
scilicet et grandes viridi cum luce zmaragdi
auro includuntur teritur thalassina vestis
assidue et Veneris sudorem exercita potat.
et bene parta patrum fiunt anademata, mitrae,
interdum in pallam atque Alidensia Ciaque vertunt.
eximia veste et victu convivia, ludi,
pocula crebra, unguenta coronae serta parantur,
nequiquam, quoniam medio de fonte leporum
surgit amari aliquid quod in ipsis floribus angat,
aut cum conscius ipse animus se forte remordet

desidiose agere aetatem lustrisque perire,
aut quo in ambiguo verbum iaculata reliquit
quod cupido adfixum cordi vivescit ut ignis,
aut nimium iactare oculos aliumve tueri
quod putat in vultuque videt vestigia risus.
    Atque in amore mala haec proprio summeque secundo
inveniuntur; in adverso vero atque inopi sunt,
prendere quae possis oculorum lumine operto,
innumerabilia; ut melius vigilare sit ante,
qua docui ratione, cavereque ne inliciaris.
nam vitare, plagas in amoris ne iaciamur,
non ita difficile est quam captum retibus ipsis
exire et validos Veneris perrumpere nodos.
et tamen implicitus quoque possis inque peditus
effugere infestum, nisis tute tibi obvius obstes
et praetermittas animi vitia omnia primum
aut quae corpori' sunt eius, quam praepetis ac vis.
nam faciunt homines plerumque cupidine caeci
et tribuunt ea quae non sunt his commoda vere.
multimodis igitur pravas turpisque videmus
esse in deliciis summoque in honore vigere.
atque alios alii irrident Veneremque suadent
ut placent, quoniam foedo adflictentur amore,
nec sua respiciunt miseri mala maxime saepe.
nigra melichrus est, immunda et fetida acosmos,
caesia Palladim, nervosa et lignea dorcas,
parvula, pumilio, chariton mia, tota merum sal,
magna atque immanis cataplexis plenaque honoris.
balba loqui non quit, traulizi, muta pudens est;
et flagrans odiosa loquacula Lampadium fit.
ischnon eromenion tum fit, cum vivere non quit
prae macie; rhadine verost iam mortua tussi.
at tumida et mammosa Ceres est ipsa ab Iaccho,
simula Silena ac Saturast, labeosa philema.
cetera de genere hoc longum est si dicere coner.
sed tamen esto iam quantovis oris honore,
cui Veneris membris vis omnibus exoriatur:
nempe aliae quoque sunt; nempe hac sine viximus ante;
nempe eadem facit, et scimus facere, omnia turpi,
et miseram taetris se suffit odoribus ipsa
quam famulae longe fugitant furtimque cachinnant.
at lacrimans exclusus amator limina saepe
floribus et sertis operit postisque superbos
unguit amaracino et foribus miser oscula figit;
quem si, iam admissum, venientem offenderit aura
una modo, causas abeundi quaerat honestas,
et meditata diu cadat alte sumpta querella,
stultitiaque ibi se damnet, tribuisse quod illi
plus videat quam mortali concedere par est.
nec Veneres nostras hoc fallit; quo magis ipsae
omnia summo opere hos vitae postscaenia celant
quos retinere volunt adstrictos esse in amore,

nequiquam, quoniam tu animo tamen omnia possis
protraher in lucem atque omnis inquirere risus
et, si bello animost et non odiosa, vicissim
praetermittere <et> humanis concedere rebus.
    Nec mulier semper ficto suspirat amore
quae complexa viri corpus cum corpore iungit
et tenet assuctis umectans oscula labris.
nam facit ex animo saepe et communia quaerens
gaudia sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris.
nec ratione alia volucres armenta feraeque
et pecudes et equae maribus subsidere possent,
si non, ipsa quod illarum subat ardet abundans
natura et Venerem salientum laeta retractat.
nonne vidis etiam quos mutua saepe voluptas
vinxit, ut in vinclis communibus excrucientur?
in triviis cum saepe canes, discedere aventes,
diversi cupide summis ex viribu' tendunt, [1210]
cum interea validis Veneris compagibus haerent; [1204]
quod facerent numquam nisi mutua gaudia nossent [1205]
quae iacere in fraudem possent vinctosque tenere. [1206]
quare etiam atque etiam, ut dico, est communi'
voluptas. [1207]
    Et commiscendo cum semine forte virilem [1208]
femina vim vicit subita corripuitque, [1209]
tum similes matrum materno semine fiunt,
ut patribus patrio. sed quos utriusque figurae
esse vides, iuxtim miscentis vulta parentum,
corpore de patrio et materno sanguine crescunt,
semina cum Veneris stimulis excita per artus
obvia conflixit conspirans mutuus ardor,
et neque utrum superavit eorum nec superatumst.
fit quoque ut interdum similes exister avorum
possint et referant proavorum saepe figuras
propterea quia multa modis primordia multis
mixta suo celant in corpore saepe parentes,
quae patribus patres tradunt a stirpe profecta;
inde Venus varia producit sorte figuras
maiorum refert vultus vocesque comasque;
quandoquidem nilo magis de semine certo
fiunt quam facies et corpora membraque nobis.
et muliebre oritur patrio de semine saeclum
maternoque mares exsistunt corpore creti.
semper enim partus duplici de semine constat,
atque utri similest magis id quodcumque creatur,
eius habet plus parte aequa; quod cernere possis
sive virum suboles sivest muliebris origo.
    Nec divina satum genitalem numina cuiquam
absterrent, pater a gnatis ne dulcibus umquam
apelletur et ut sterili Venere exigat aevum;
quod plerumque putant et multo sanguine maesti
conspergunt aras adolentque altaria donis,
ut gravidas reddant uxores semine largo.

nequiquam divum numen sortisque fatigant.
nam steriles nimium crasso sunt semine partim
et liquido praeter iustum tenuique vicissim.
tenve locis quia non potis est adfiger adhaesum,
liquitur extemplo et revocatum cedit abortu.
crassius his porro quoniam concretius aequo
mittitur, aut non tam prolixo provolat ictu
aut penetrare locos aeque nequit aut penetratum
aegre admiscetur muliebri semine semen.
nam multum harmoniae Veneris differre videntur.
atque alias alii complent magis ex aliisque
succipiunt aliae pondus magis inque gravescunt.
et multae steriles Hymenaeis ante fuerunt
pluribus et nactae post sunt unde tamen puellos
suscipere et partu possent ditescere dulci.
et quibus ante domi fecundae saepe nequissent
uxores parere, inventast illis quoque compar
natura, ut possent gnatis munere senectam.
usque adeo magni refert, ut semina possint
seminibus commisceri genitaliter apta,
crassa conveniant liquidis et liquida crassis.
atque in eo refertquo victu vita colatur;
namque aliis rebus concrescunt semina membris
atque aliis extenvantur tabentque vicissim.
et quibus ipsa modis tractetur blanda voluptas,
id quo permagni refert; name more ferarum
quadrupedumque magis ritu plerumque putantur
concipere uxores, quia sic loca sumere possunt,
pectoribus positis, sublatis semina lumbis.
nec molles opu' sunt motus uxoribus hilum.
nam mulier prohibet se concipere atque repugnat,
clunibus ipsa viri Venerem si laeta retractat
atque exossato ciet omni pectore fluctus;
eicit enim sulcu recta regione viaque
vomeris atque locis avertit seminis ictum.
idque sua causa consuerunt scorta moveri,
ne complerentur crebro gravidaeque iacerent
et simul ipsa viris Venus ut concinnior esset;
coniugibus quod nil nostris opus esse videtur.
    Nec divinitus interdum Venerisque saggittis
deteriore fit ut forma muliercula ametur.
nam facit ipsa suis interdum femina factis
morigerisque modis et munde corpore culto,
ut facile insuescat <te> secum degere vitam.
quod superest, consuetuda concinnat amorem;
nam leviter quamvis quod crebro tunditur ictu,
vincitur in longo spatio tamen atque labascit.
nonne vides etiam guttas in saxa cadentis
umoris longo in spatio pertundere saxa?

That seed, of which we spoke before, is stirred up in us
when the age of adulthood first invigorates the limbs;

for various causes move and stir up different things:
only the power of a human being can arouse human semen;
and as soon as it goes cast forth from its source,
it withdraws through the limbs and joints, throughout the whole body,
coming together in certain places, and immediately stimulates the genitalia of the body themselves. Irritated by the seed,
they swell, and there arises a desire to eject it
into that towards which one's dreadful lust strives.
[it arouses the distended places, irritating them with much semen]
And the body seeks that by which the mind is wounded with love.
For all men generally fall towards a wound, and one's blood spurts out
in the direction from which we are struck with a blow;
and if the enemy is near at hand, the red liquid surprises him.
Therefore, he who receives a blow from the missiles of Venus--
whether a boy with womanly limbs strikes him,
or a woman scattering love out of her whole body--
he struggles towards that by which he is wounded,
and lusts to join with it,
and to hurl the liquid drawn from his body into that body.
For his mute lust foretells delight.
This is what Venus is for us;
from this, moreover, comes the name of love.
It is from here that the drop of the sweetness of Venus has first trickled into the heart, and frigid care has followed.
For if what you love is absent, its phantoms nevertheless
are at hand, and its sweet name hovers by your ears.
But it is right to keep fleeing from the phantoms,
and to frighten the fodder of love away from oneself,
and to turn one's mind to something else,
and to cast the collected liquid into any body at all,
and not to retain it, having turned,
once and for all, to the love of one woman alone,
storing up care and certain pain for oneself.
For the ulcer thrives and grows strong by feeding,
and the madness swells day by day, and the suffering grows worse,
unless you disturb the first wounds with new blows
and heal them beforehand while fresh,
straying about with a vulgar Venus of the streets;
or unless you are able to transfer
the movements of your mind to something else.
Nor does he who avoids love lack the enjoyment of Venus, but instead he chooses advantages which come without a penalty.

For surely there is more pure pleasure from this
for reasonable men rather than wretched ones.
And indeed, at the very moment of possession
the ardor of lovers fluctuates in uncertain doubt--
and it is not clear what they might enjoy first
with their eyes and their hands.
What they have sought they press tightly,
and cause pain to the body,
and they often pound their teeth on the lips
and inflict kisses, because the pleasure is not pure,
and there are goads which incite one to wound the very thing
from which the seeds of madness arise, whatsoever it may be.
But Venus lightly breaks up the pains within love,
and the flattering intermingled pleasure checks the
bites.
For there is the hope that the flame may be extinguished
by the very body from which the ardor originates.
Yet Nature resists that this should come to pass, contrary to
everything.
And this is one thing of the sort that, the more we have of
it,
the more one's heart burns with dreadful lust.
For food and liquid are taken up within the limbs;
since they can fill up certain areas,
this desire for water and bread is easily satisfied.
But truly, nothing is given to the body for enjoyment
from a face and from lovely coloring, save delicate
phantoms,
which one's wretched little hope snatches away like the wind.
Just as when, in a dream, a thirsty man wants to drink,
and the liquid which might extinguish the burning in his limbs
is not given to him; yet he seeks the phantoms of water,
and he strives in vain, and thirsts
while drinking in a torrent stream--
just so Venus deceives lovers who are in love with phantoms,
and they cannot satisfy their bodies, even gazing face-to-
face,
nor can they scrape anything off delicate limbs
with their hands wandering uncertainly over the whole body.
At last, when they are enjoying the flower of their age
with their limbs entwined, when the body already has
a presentiment of delights, and when Venus is on
the point
of sowing the furrows of a female,
and when they fasten their bodies together,
and mingle their saliva in their mouths,
and breathe in, pressing their teeth on the mouth--
all in vain, because they cannot scrape off anything,
nor can they penetrate another body and disappear into it
with their whole body--for at times they appear to want to do
this,
and to struggle to do so: to such an extent they cling

lustfully
in the snares of Venus, while their limbs,
shaken by the violence of their pleasure, melt away.
At length, when the stored-up lust has erupted from the nerves,
for a little while there comes a pause in the violent ardor.
The same madness returns, and that fury comes back,
when they seek to seize for themselves that which they lust for;
nor can they find the mechanism that will defeat that evil:
to such a degree they pine away in doubt with their hidden wound.
Add to this that they waste their strength away
and perish with the effort; add that their life is lived
at the beck and call of someone else. Meanwhile, affairs slide,
and are transformed into Babylonian luxuries.
Duties languish, and one's tottering reputation grows sick.
Indeed, unguents and lovely Sicyonian works smile on her feet,
and great emeralds are set into gold, and her sea-dyed dress
is constantly worn away and drinks the sweat of Venus steadily.
And the well-gotten wealth of one's father turns into headbands, turbans;
at times they turn it into Greek cloaks and stuff from Alinda and Ceos.
Banquets distinguished for dress and food, games,
cups one after another, perfumes, garlands and wreaths are prepared--
in vain, because in the midst of a fountain of delights
there arises something bitter which chokes you,
even amidst the flowers; either when by chance your conscious mind
torments you about leading your life in idleness
and perishing in debauchery--or because she has left,
having thrown out an ambiguous word, stuck like a fire
in your lusting heart--or because you think that she casts her eyes
about too much and gazes at another, and you see the traces
of a smile upon her countenance.
And these evils are found in lasting and very fortunate love;
in truly adverse and helpless love there are countless ones
which you could perceive with light shut from your eyes;
how much better it is to be wary beforehand for the reason
which I have taught you, and to watch out lest you are seduced.
For it is not so difficult to avoid being cast into the snares of love
as to get out, once captured by its very snare,
and to break through the strong knots of Venus.

And nevertheless, even caught and hindered, you can also
escape from the trap unless you stand in your own way
and at first ignore the vices of mind and body that she has
whom you desire and want. For on the whole, men blinded by lust
create and assign virtues to women which are not truly theirs.
Therefore we see women, in many ways vicious and filthy,
flourishing in luxury and in their greatest honor.
And some men laugh at others, and urge them to placate Venus
since they are afflicted with a revolting love;
and the wretches often do not consider their enormous ills.
A black woman is called "honey-gold"; a filthy one, "unadorned";
a blue-eyed one, "little Athena"; a nervous and wooden one, "gazelle";
a tiny dwarf, "one of the Graces, all pure wit";
a huge and monstrous one, "amazing and filled with beauty".
A stammerer cannot speak: "she lisps"; a mute is "bashful";
but a flagrantly hateful chatterer becomes "brightness".
When she cannot stay alive from emaciation, she is "a slight little love";
one all but dead from coughing is truly "slender".
But one with huge swollen breasts is "Ceres herself, nursing Bacchus";
a snub-nose is "lady Silena or Satyress".
If I tried to say other things of this sort,
it would take a long time.
But nevertheless, let there be one truly as beautiful of face
as you will, from whom the power of Venus
arises from every limb--surely there are also others;
surely she does all the same foul things--and we know she does;
and she even fumigates her wretched self with hideous odors;
her handmaidens flee far off and giggle furtively.
But her shut-out weeping lover often covers her threshold
with flowers and garlands, and anoints her haughty door-post
with marjoram; and the wretch fastens kisses to the door;
if he were once admitted, a single waft of odor would offend him
as he came in, and he would seek honorable reasons to leave;
and his high-flown studied lament would cease,
and he would damn himself for his stupidity,
for he would see that he had attributed to her
more than is fitting for a mortal.
And this does not deceive our Venuses; therefore,
with the greatest labor they conceal all these things
from those whom they wish to keep drawn tight in love--
in vain--because you can nonetheless drag these things
out into the light with your mind, and to search out the game;

and if she has a fair mind, and is not hateful,
you can let these things pass in turn
and make concessions to human flaws.
     Nor does a woman always sign with feigned love,
when embracing a man she joins her body with his,
and holds him fast with sucking lips, making him wet with kisses.
For often she does it from her heart,
and, seeking pleasure in common, she tempts you
to traverse a space of love. And for no other reason
can birds, cattle, wild beasts and tame flocks and mares
lie beneath their males, unless it is because their own nature,
abounding in fire, burns them; and they take on
again their throbbing lust with joy.
Do you not see how even those whom mutual pleasure
has often vanquished are crucified in common fetters?
Indeed, dogs at crossroads, lusting to depart,
strive apart eagerly with their greatest strength, [1210]
while, in the meantime, they stick fast [1204]
in the powerful joints of Venus; which they would never do, [1205]
unless they felt common pleasure--which might cause them hurt
and keep them bound together. Therefore, as I say, [1206]
again and again: their pleasure is mutual. [1207]
     And when by chance in the mixing of seeds, [1208]
a woman has attacked and conquered a man's force [1209]
with sudden violence, then offspring are created
from the mother's seed resembling their mothers,
just as those from their father's are like the father.
But those you see who resemble the figure of either one,
mingling intimately the countenances of their parents--
they rise up from the body of the father
and from the blood of the mother, when a mutual ardor,
as they breathe together, has flung together at each other
the seeds of Venus, aroused throughout all their limbs,
by the goads of Venus, and neither one has conquered
or been conquered by the other.
At time it also happens that children can spring forth
similar to their grandparents, and often they recall the
appearance of their great-grandparents, since many first-beginnings,
intermingled in many ways, are often hidden
in the bodies of their parents; fathers hand these on to fathers:
from these Venus brings forth, with mutable chance,
the shapes of one's ancestors, and recalls their faces,
their voices, and their hair, because they come into being
from predetermined seeds, just like our own bodies and limbs.
And a female child arises from a father's seed,
and males spring forth born from their mothers' bodies.

In truth, a child always comes from a double seed
and whosoever is created is more like the one
of which it has more than an equal share;
you can perceive this: whether the child comes from the male,
or is of female origin.
And divine powers do not deny fruitful seed to anyone
so that he may never be called a father by sweet sons
and live out his life in sterile intercourse;
this is what men, for the most part, believe,
and, full of sorrow, they besprinkle altars with much
blood,
and pile them up with gifts so that they may
make their wives pregnant with an abundance of seed.
In vain do they importune the divine nature of the gods
and of the fates. For some of them are sterile
from semen that is too thick; and others from semen
that is too liquid and thinner than proper.
Because the thin kind cannot stick adhering to places,
it drips off straight away, and leaves abortively.
Moreover, the former, since it is sent out
being more solid than proper, does not fly forth
with a favorable blow or cannot penetrate places properly;
or, having penetrated them, does not mix well
with a woman's seed. For the couplings of Venus
seem to differ a great deal. And some men fill some women
more easily with child; and some women receive their burden
from different men, and become pregnant.
And many women have been sterile before in several marriages,
and have nevertheless received afterward the seed from which
they beget little children, and they can grow rich
in sweet childbirth. And they whose fertile wives
could not give birth in their own houses--for them
is found
a like nature so they may provide their old age with sons.
It is very important to such an extent
that seeds fit for procreation intermingle with other such
seeds,
and that thick ones come together with liquid ones,
and liquid ones with thick ones. And it matters
by what nourishment one's life is sustained,
for some things thicken the seeds in one's limbs,
and they are thinned by others, and waste away in turn.
And the manner in which the act of flattering pleasure itself
is managed--that, too, matters a great deal;
for they say that wives conceive more often, and in most
cases,
in the manner of quadrupeds, because the seeds
can take their place when the breasts are placed low,
the buttocks lifted up. And wives have no need of
sexy movements at all. For a woman keeps herself
from conceiving and fights it off if she cheerfully
withdraws the man's erection with her buttocks;

and his flood spills over all her boneless breast.
For indeed she casts the track of the plow away
from its proper area and path, and she turns
the strike of the seed away from its place.
And whores are wont to turn this to their own purpose,
lest they be filled repeatedly and lie pregnant,
and so that the act of sex may be more refined for men;
this does not seem to be necessary at all for our wives.
And now and then it happens--neither because of
divine power not the shafts of Venus--that a little woman
of somewhat inferior appearance is loved. For at times,
the woman herself causes this through her own deeds
and compliant ways, and a body elegantly adorned;
so that with ease she accustoms you to leading your life
with her. What is more, habit brings love into being;
for whatever is struck again and again with repeated blows
is nonetheless overcome over a long period of time,
and yields. Do you not see how drops of water falling on cliffs
bore through the rocks over a long period of time?[43]

The preceding long passage constitutes the latter part of Book IV, which is chiefly devoted to the function and reliability of the human senses and thought.[44] Immediately before his discussion of sexuality and human love, Lucretius first analyzes the nature of dreams (900-1029) and then progresses to a brief description of nocturnal emissions as an indication of sexual maturity in the human male (1030-1036), perhaps a surprising subject for poetry in terms of modern taste, but acceptable within the context of the didactic function of the *De Rerum Natura*. These verses form a logical transition to the treatise on human sexuality. The reader is led to expect either a straight-forward disquisition on human biology according to Epicurean theory and/or to contemporary scientific knowledge, or, alternatively, lines of poetic beauty, the "honey on the rim of the cup,"[45] parallel to the first part of the Venus passage in Book I, praising the

natural human instinct to procreate. The rest of Book IV, however, is a different matter.

Before beginning the analysis of the Book IV passage, however, a crucial point must be made: Lucretius' lines on human sexuality deal only with *male* sexuality, from the viewpoint of a *male speaker*. The woman's viewpoint is never taken, or, in other terms, the woman's voice is never heard in these verses. There is nothing surprising about this in itself: virtually all extant Roman literature from the first century B.C. through the first century A.D. is written by males from a male perspective. The few surviving lines of verse by a woman poet, Sulpicia, are hardly enough to give the scholar clues to identifying a literary woman's voice.[46]

It will take Ovid, writing from an imaginary woman's perspective in the *Heroides*, to create the only exception to the only exception to the all-male viewpoint taken by literature during this period. In his experimental attempt to enter the feminine mind by means of the epistolary form, he manifestly stands apart from his contemporaries; yet it can be argued that even these fictive women's voices created by a man are at best spurious. To accuse Lucretius, then, of not being sufficiently ahead of his time serves no purpose; however, Lucretius' perception of human sexuality and the relationships between men and women seems to establish a paradigm followed by the other three poets discussed in subsequent chapters.

The long passage in Book IV dealing with human sexuality

is by no means a unified whole; it is therefore useful to look briefly at its structure before considering its content. A long section consisting of lines 1036 through 1120 deals with the physical nature of sex as well as the dangers of emotional attachment; lines 1121 through 1140 speak of the economic dangers resulting from love affairs. Lines 1141 through 1152, an exhortation to break the bonds of love if caught, act as a transition to a kind of Catalogue of Women (1153-1170), followed by what may be described as a *paraclausythyron* transmogrified (1170-1191). Lines 1190 through [1207] discuss sexual passion as an instinct common to both sexes, while lines [1208] through 1277 give a straightforward account of human heredity and infertility according to then-current scientific theory. The passage ends with a short coda, lines 1279 through 1286, a brief final comment on the possibility of love and affection between the two sexes.

The first section of the passage (1036-1120) discusses male sexuality purely in terms of a physiological phenomenon. The process of erection is described in mechanical terms: at sexual maturity, a male a.) receives a stimulus from a person perceived as attractive (1037-1040)[47]; b.) semen is secreted throughout the body (1042)[48]; c.) it collects in the genitalia which swell (1044-1045), causing an erection and consequently the need to eject the semen. An unexpected shift of tone, however, occurs very early in what promises to be a straightforward scientific exposition. At this point one may

recall a key phrase from the second half of the Venus passage in Book I, the description of Mavors as "aeterno devictus vulnere amoris" (34), defeated by the eternal wound of love. It is this image of love as a wound suffered by the male that becomes the *leitmotiv* in Lucretius' vision of male sexuality. The graphic account of physiological processes that the reader is initially led to expect turns instead into a long and savage attack on love, filled with images of violence. As we shall see, the ultimate effect of the passage is that woman is seen as the violator, while the male lover becomes the violated.

In the passage there is a relentless insistence on the hurt of the male, most often cast in terms pertaining to violent conflict. The wound imagery first occurs in a conventional phrase, "mens unde est saucia amore" (1048, from where the mind is wounded by love), and recurs throughout the passage: "Veneris qui telis accipit ictus" (1051, he who receives the blows of Venus' shafts); "si non prima novis conturbes vulnera plagis" (1070, unless you dissipate the first wounds by new blows); "et stimuli subsunt qui instigant laedere" (1082, and beneath there are impulses which cause one to wound).

The most elaborately developed wound imagery occurs in lines 1049-1051.

> namque omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus et illam
> emicat in partem sanguis unde icimur ictu,
> et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor.

> For all men usually fall towards (the source of) a wound and blood spatters the place from which we are struck by a blow, and if the enemy is near, the red liquid covers him (her?).

This vivid miniature scene of hand-to-hand combat begins with the observation of a physical fact, namely that the victim of a sudden blow tends to fall towards its source rather than away from it; then the reader sees the ugly reality of a battle encounter; the gore of the victim covers his adversary (or executioner?). One cannot, however, avoid thinking of this scene as a metaphor for sexual congress; it is not a pleasant vision. The male lover falls toward the woman who will wound, or possibly destroy him; the emphasis on spurting gore carries a suggestion of the female as castrator. A curious reversal of the genders has taken place; in sexual terms blood is normally associated with the female, not the male partner. It is the female partner whose torn tissues bleed on first penetration while the penis remains unscathed; furthermore, woman is associated with blood because of the cyclical bleeding connected with her fertility.

Love, however, is not depicted only as a wound: it becomes, in turn, a spreading ulcer (*ulcus*, 1968); madness (*furor*, 1069; *rabies*, 1083); a calamity (*aerumna* , 1069); and fire (*ardor* , 1086; *flamma* , 1087; *ardescit*, 1090). Furthermore, the actions of men in the throes of love here are connected with violence; love is inextricably bound up with pain, both given and received. Lovers press hard the objects of their desire (*premunt arte*, 1079) and scrape them with

their hands (*manibus abradere membris*, 1103). Kisses are not given but inflicted (*adfligunt oscula*, 1081), and teeth are used for biting the sexual partner's lips (*dentis inlidunt labellis*, 1080; *pressantes dentibus ora*, 1109). Even the simplest and most innocuous gesture of love, the kiss, is reduced to a mingling of bodily fluids: *iunguntque salivas* (1108). Thus the act of love is shown as dangerous for the male partner, while simple acts of sexual intimacy are made to seem repellent. The reader has now been taken far from the *blanda voluptas* of Book I; sexual pleasure is now inextricably interconnected with suffering and pain:

> sed leviter poenas frangit Venus inter amorem
> blandaque refrenat morsus admixta voluptas.
>
> But Venus lightly breaks up the pains within love
> and charming pleasure restrains the intermingled bites.
> (1084-1085)

One can now identify what Venus represents in Book IV. On the simplest level, the word Venus here stands for the most primitive male sexual drive: the need to ejaculate semen into a female receptacle. In fact the narrator insists on the separation of the physical act of sex from emotional involvement with a woman, clearly seen as unnecessary as well as dangerous:

> sed fugitare decet simulacra et pabula amoris
> absterrere sibi atque alio convertere mentem
> et iacere umorem collectum in corpora quaeque
> nec retinere, semel conversum unius amore,
> et servare sibi curam certumque dolorem.
>
> But the decent thing is to flee from the phantoms
> and to scare the fodder of love away from oneself;
> and to turn one's mind to something else;

> and to cast the collected fluid into any body at all;
> and not to hold it back, turning once and for all
> to the love of one woman alone; and thus to store up
> care and inevitable pain for oneself. (1063-1067)

It can be argued that Lucretius' emphasis on the danger of emotional involvement--as opposed to the need to satisfy the physical sexual drive--has its source in the Epicurean concept of *ataraxia*, the need for emotional detachment and equilibrium in all areas of life, which a passionate love affair is apt to disturb. It is, however, unclear what views Epicurus held on the issue of sex and love since only a few disassociated fragments of his writings have survived; it is impossible to know to what extent the Book IV passage is Lucretian.[49] Some fragments from the hand of Epicurus seem to imply that marriage is to be avoided, while the act of sex can be pleasurable, but the minimal available evidence is ambiguous and much disputed.[50] It appears, however, that Epicurus accepted women disciples, on equal terms with men, into the philosophical community of his Garden School,[51] a practice unusual for the time. Furthermore, even if the content of the Book IV passage is based on Epicurean thought, its tone seems to be uniquely Lucretian: while the few extant fragments by the hand of Epicurus are straightforward and detached in tone if not dry,[52] the Venus passage of Book IV is, in contrast, emotionally charged and full of verbal violence. It is something more than a rational plea for emotionally uninvolved sex; the term Venus has taken on a dark coloring.

As in Book I, the concept of Venus in Book IV cannot be reduced to a simple definition. While on one level Venus is, as it has been suggested, simply a metaphor for primitive male sexuality, on another level she remains the Goddess of Love, but she is represented under an aspect very different from that of the benign Genetrix, the Creatress of the first part of the Invocation. It was suggested earlier in this chapter that the second half of Lucretius' Venus diptych in the Invocation depicts a rather cold, enigmatic figure. In Book IV, however, she is utterly transformed: Venus become the Dark Goddess, the merciless tormenter who mocks the men that fall into her power before destroying them (*ludit*, 1111). She is now a figure akin to the Venus of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, who ruthlessly sacrifices an innocent Phaedra in a fit of pique against the excessively chaste male devote of Artemis,[53] or to the "Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée" of Jean Racine.[54]

The Venus of Euripides or Racine, however, claims a female victim, one of her own sex; this Venus lays low the male lover. Since the woman's viewpoint is never taken in the passage from Book IV, the unknown female partner of the male lover remains an enigma, a blank. The reader does not know whether and if she is at all affected by this destroying Venus. The effect of this void of information about the female partner in sex is that only the male lover seems to suffer. Because of the total absence of her voice from the

text, woman appears to be immune to the torments inflicted by Venus on the male gender. The male lover, then, appears to be the sole victim of this dark Venus.

The tone of this passage is not, however, sustained throughout the rest of Book IV. The short section which follows (1120-1140) shifts into satirical form, a diatribe in the Lucilian tradition against men foolish enough to waste their money on luxury goods for women.[55] Ostensibly the passage is designed to ridicule over-fond male lovers, but women come off no better: the poet's argument is that women are simply not worth the expense. Yet even in this passage an unexpected note of profound disgust with the act of sex, incongruous within its context, is sounded. In lines 1126-1127, the luxuriousness of the "sea-dyed" dress (probably a garment stained red-purple with expensive dye obtained from the murex)[56] is juxtaposed against the bodily reality of a woman's sweat, produced, it is implied, during the throes of intercourse. The sense of disgust conveyed by the narrator is heightened by the personified dress drinking the sweat rather than soaking it up:

> ...teriturque thalassina vestis
> assidue, et Veneris sudorem exercita potat.
>
> The sea-dyed dress is worn down constantly,
> and, well-used, it drinks the sweat of Venus.

Yet in this passage, too, the male is cast as victim. The male lover is shown as prone to paranoia over the slightest gestures of his beloved: he sees danger in an

ambiguous word spoken by her (1137); he is eaten by jealousy if she looks at another man (1139); he is suspicious of the trace of a smile on her features (1140); but he does not take any forthright action. This is a passive stance, one that is traditionally associated with women; conventional sex roles are once again curiously reversed.

The short transitional section which follows (1140-1152) is a reiterated warning against the dangers of love. After the satiric interlude, the text returns to the figure of Venus as Destroyer. As it has been shown, in the first part of the passage in Book IV dealing with the nature of Venus the dominant imagery was based on the concept of love as a wound and sexual intercourse as war; here, however, love is seen as a hunt. The male lover is once more in danger, playing the role of the hunted beast or bird. Verbal traps lurk everywhere: *plagas* (1145); *retibus* (1146); *validos nodos* (1148); *implicitus, inque peditus* (1149). Venus sets the traps; is the reader asked to imagine that the beloved will finally despatch her male victim like the hunter his prey?

After this short bridge passage Lucretius returns to the satirical mode one again[57] with a Catalogue of Women, creating his own variant on a tradition that goes back to Semonides' women-as-animals.[58] Here the satire is directed against the male lover, benighted by his lust, who refuses to see the obvious physical imperfections of his beloved. The passage is a tour-de-force which juxtaposes the euphemistic

endearments fabricated by lovers (in Greek) with plain home truths (in Latin): for example, "honey-gold" really means black (1160); "gazelle" is a wooden and nervous girl (1161); "Ceres" is a fat, blowzy woman.

In its length as well as detail, however, this passage goes far beyond Semonides' *Catalogue*. The extensive and relentless listing of the physical flaws of women has the result of uglifying the entire female sex in the reader's eyes; this catalogue does not have a Melissa-like figure to redeem womankind.[59] Woman has no voice to defend herself in Lucretius: there is no rebuttal, no equivalent Catalogue of Men listing the defects of the male sex. The ultimate effect of the passage is misogynistic.

The reader, however, is led briefly to expect a slight retraction, a minute toning-down of the misogyny:

> sed tamen esto iam quantovis oris honore,
> cui Veneris membris vis omnibus exoriatur (1171-1172)
>
> But nevertheless, suppose that there be is indeed
> one of as much beauty of countenance as you will,
> from whose limbs the force of Venus arises.

This is, however, a false lead, a transition into a passage that transmogrifies the commonplace theme of the *exclusus amator* (1170-1191). It begins by implying that one attractive female body is interchangeable with another: "nempe aliae quoque sunt; nempe hac sine viximus ante" (1173, surely there are also other women; surely we lived before without this one). The savagery of what follows is truly worthy of Jonathan Swift. In "the Lady's Dressing Room," Swift's Celia

sweats under her arms, drops dandruff, spits and shits behind the door which excludes her lover.[60] Lucretius does not go quite so far; his nameless woman merely fumigates herself with foul-smelling substances (1175),[61] repulsive enough to make her maid-servants titter, while the lover outside serenades the vision of loveliness that is the false creation of his own imagination.

Once again the male lover is the ridiculous victim, not only of his own delusions, but also of the conscious deception practiced by the beloved, who chooses to conceal the reality of her bodily processes behind the scenes in order to keep her lover in her power:

> nec Veneres nostras hoc fallit; quo magis ipsae
> omnia summo opere hos vitae postscaenia celant
> quos retinere volunt adstrictos esse in amore (1184-1186)
>
> Nor does this deceive our Venuses; therefore they themselves
> hide all these things behind the scenes from those
> that they want to hold and to keep bound in love.

The last lines in this short but savage section suggest a faint possibility that a male might come to terms with the physical realities of a woman's body. But what the poet seems to grant with one hand is taken away by the other: a man can do so only if a woman is "of good heart and not hateful" (1190, si bello animost et non odiosa). The implication is that this is rare indeed. The moral onus, then, is laid on the woman, since the reader hears nothing about the moral qualities which a man may need to form a satisfactory love relationship; they are made irrelevant to the issue. The

satire purportedly aimed at the deluded male lover has been turned against woman instead.

The respective roles of men and women in a sexual relationship (love is evidently not an issue here) seem to be shown in a more equitable manner in the next section (1192-1207). Here the poet states emphatically that men and women have a common share in the pleasure of sexual intercourse: "quare etiam atque etiam, ut dico, est communi voluptas" ([1207], wherefore I say, again and again, the pleasure is common to both). As partners in sex, man and woman are placed on an equal footing: the male is not cast as victim, the female does not dominate. There is even a faint echo of the *blanda voluptas* of the fecund animal kingdom in Book I:

> nec ratione alia volucres armenta feraeque
> et pecudes et equae maribus subsidere possent,
> si non, ipsa quod illarum subat ardet abundans
> natura et Venerem salientum laeta retractat. (1197-1200)
>
> Nor can birds, cattle, wild beasts and flocks and mares
> lie beneath their males, unless it is because
> they burn abundantly with the nature that fires them
> and gladly takes up again the mounting male.[62]

Yet the tone of the passage is ambiguous. The female partner engaged in the process of the sexual act is described as clasping her lover and holding him fast with sucking lips and making him wet with kisses (*quae complexa viri corpus cum corpore iungit/assuctis umectans oscula labris*, 1193-1194). It is the woman who seems to be acting as the agressive partner and playing the active role. The male partner's role

remains vague, and by implication passive, because the poet chooses not to speak about it. The verbal picture of the woman's sloppy kisses conveyed by these lines is, moreover, repellent. Nonetheless it is less so than the reduction of both partners in sex to dogs copulating at the crossroads (1201-1205), who despite their lust are said yet suffer the agonies of crucifixion (*excrucientur*, 1202). Lucretius' cultivated readers would surely have caught resonances of the Greek epic tradition, particularly the *Iliad*, where numerous references are made to dogs as eaters of the bodies of heroes that have become carrion--a contemptible form of animal life.[63] Thus although man and woman seem to gain a form of equality in their lust, it is not an attractive or desirable one.

The last long section before the final short coda is an account of what might be called a primitive theory of genetics, based on he assumption that both men and women produce semen.[64] Here Lucretius reverts to the didactic mode, dealing both with human heredity and with infertility problems. Book IV now seemingly returns once again to the realm of scientific theory. In brief, according to what may have been Epicurus' view, the resemblance of children of either sex to the male or female parent depends on whose semen they receive in a greater quantity at conception. Lucretius also addresses the issue of ancestral traits, which, he states, are passed on by *primordia* (seemingly equivalent to

human genes) carried within the bodies of both parents ([1208]-1232). The discussion of human fertility points out that successful reproduction is a result of the proper and harmonious consistency of the semen of both the male and the female, not of divine providence (1233-1277).

Nevertheless, even in this section, which is essentially a straight-forward exposition, there are phrases which imply that a woman has power and advantage over man sexually. There is a return to war imagery: at the beginning of the passage the semen of the man and the woman mingling together are yet at the same time engaged in combat:

> Et commiscendo cum semine forte virilem
> femina vim vicit subita vi corripuitque
> tum similes matrum materno semine fiunt
> ut patribus patrio. ([1208]-1211)

> And when in intercourse a woman has conquered
> and corrupted the man's strength with sudden violence,
> then they become like their mothers because of the
> mother's semen--
> or like their fathers because of the father's.

The woman's seed is the attacker, while the man's goes down to defeat; there is no corresponding reversal of roles in the brief and vague phrase *ut patribus patrio*. Thus by the poet's omission of any detail which shows the male seed as victorious in turn, man once again becomes the victim in the war of the sexes. The traditional image of man as the active plough and woman as the passive field to be ploughed occurs near the end of the passage (1272-1273). Yet even here woman is not depicted merely as a passive aspect of nature: she has the power to divert and destroy the man's seed by a mere movement

of her buttocks (1270). The adjective *exossato* (boneless, or even deboned, 1271), referring to a woman's breasts, is unusual in this context, and implies a peculiar, even threatening sinuosity on the woman's part. It suggests something reptilian rather than human, perhaps an eel or a snake: an unexpected visitor in the furrow to be ploughed, and not necessarily a pleasant partner in bed.

Even the short coda to Book IV, which seems to admit, however, briefly, the possibility of a harmonious and even affectionate marriage (1278-1287),[65] ultimately has the effect not only of diminishing woman, but also of suggesting her inherently dangerous nature yet one last time. To describe an acceptable spouse, the poet chooses to use the word *muliercula* (little woman, wifey), a diminutive which has the effect of reduction and dismissal if not contempt. The little wife is compared to a steady drip of water which, in the course of time, wears away even rocks; the simile implies, of course, that wives are, at their best, a persistent if trivial annoyance. Surprisingly, however, the poet uses words associated with violence, *ictus* (blow, strike) and *tunditur* (1284), to describe this trickle. The implication is that even a steady marital relationship, based on convenience rather than sexual passion, can be ultimately harmful to the male partner. Thus even companionable affection between the two sexes, here presented so briefly and so ambiguously, appears to be rare if not impossible.

In summary, then, woman is depicted, over and over again, as a danger to the well-being of a male lover; moreover, traditionally regarded as the weaker sex, woman becomes the more powerful and dominant one. Sexual passion itself is seen as a peril to the male, who is likely to come to defeat if not total destruction in an inevitable war between the sexes. Women are best regarded as necessary objects for the release of sexual tension, an unavoidable physiological function of the male body; even an affectionate rather than passionate relationship between men and women is but a remote likelihood. The world of sex in Book IV is bleak if not dark, ruled over by an impersonal but demanding Venus whose traditional godhood has been withdrawn, and whose very name has been redefined as mechanical male sexuality by the poet; in effect, love between man and woman does not and cannot exist in this world.[66]

The Problem of the Relationship of the Sexes in Lucretius.

The reader is left with the impression that there is an insurmountable gap between the two sexes which cannot ever be bridged. Furthermore, since woman is never given a voice of her own in Book IV, no dialogue between men and women can ever take place, no communication exists; ultimately no common ground for men and women to meet on equal terms can be bound. There is, however, a faint suggestion that the male lover may desire some form of union with woman which goes beyond the

boundaries of mechanical sex:

> ...nil inde abradere possunt
> nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto;
> nam facere interdum velle et certare videntur (1110-1112)
>
> They cannot scrape anything off from there,
> nor can they penetrate a body and go away into it
> with their whole body; for sometimes they seem to want to,
> and strive to do so.

The image that these lines convey is curious: the male lover seems to be trying not only to penetrate a woman with his phallus, but also literally to enter her body and to subside within it in a kind of reverse birth-process.[67] A cogent explication of this psychological phenomenon is set forth by Luce Irigaray, a feminist psychoanalyst and theoretician. In revolt against the tenets generally accepted by the Lacan-dominated Ecole Freudienne of Paris[68], she has rejected Lacan's theory that the Phallus, the Transcendental Signifier, is the ultimate object of desire for all human beings. According to Irigaray, the cutting of the umbilical cord, the "unavoidable and irreparable wound"[69] marks the eternal loss of the maternal womb, the true object of desire: it is that primal sojourn and perfect wholeness to which all human beings long to return. For many males in particular, however, the idea of the maternal womb is inextricably bound up with woman's sexuality, giving rise to highly ambiguous, self-contradictory, and even destructive feelings towards the female sex in general. In Irigaray's words:

> The womb, unthought in its place of the first sojourn in which we become bodies, is fantasized by many men to be a

devouring mouth, a cloaca of anal or urethral outfall, a phallic threat at best reproductive. And in the absence of valid representations of female sexuality this womb merges with woman's sex [sexe] as a whole.

There are no words to talk about it, except filthy mutilating words. The corresponding affects will therefore be anxiety, phobia, disgust, a haunting fear of castration.[70]

This radical recasting of conventional pscychoanalytic theory presents a possible explication for the curious yearning for a melding with the body of a woman suggested in lines 1110-1112, which seem at first sight to run counter to the tenor of the rest of the Venus passage of Book IV. What Irigaray posits here about possible male attitudes towards the primal womb also accounts for the cluster of complex and tangled emotions connected with male sexuality revealed throughout the passage: fear, disgust, and anger leading to a denigration of woman, yet faintly touched with a kind of yearning desire for her. Irigaray's theory also makes it possible to see why metaphors of violence pervade the entire text, and repeatedly move it beyond the normal boundaries of a rational cautionary statement about erotic entanglements, which seems to be its primary purpose.

This revision of psychoanalytic theory gives the reader means of accounting for the complex male attitude toward sexuality that is revealed in Book IV; it must be emphasized, however, that it does not and cannot explain what Lucretius the poet may have felt and thought about women, love or sexuality. In other terms, Irigaray's theory (or any other) is merely a took, and does not form a basis for retroactively

analyzing the nature of Lucretius' personality or psyche. The attempt to do so would, in any case, be futile, as well as irrelevant to the study of a poetic fiction by a man of whom we know nothing.

The question of why Lucretius should depict male sexuality as such a tangle of negative emotions cannot, of course, be answered. It is understandable, however, why St. Jerome's apocryphal note on the life of Lucretius[71], might be a temptation to anyone who has read Book IV to construct a fictional psychic biography of the poet. Lord Tennyson's narrative poem *Lucretius*, for example, fleshes out the bare bones of St. Jerome's assertion that the poet went mad because of a love potion and eventually committed suicide. Tennyson's plot, in the spirit of the late nineteenth century, hinges on a fictive wife, Lucilia, who finds her overly-intellectual partner too cold and remote.[72] Lucretian scholars, too, have devoted a good deal of energy to discussing the nature of Lucretius' madness; the arguments proposed are, in fact, generally based on the Book IV Venus passage.[73]

Speculation about the psychic state of a writer, however, does not elucidate his texts, and is useless in the case of a poet of whom literally nothing is known except that he lived, wrote, and died during the period of the late Republic;[74] even the *De Rerum Natura* itself tells very little about its author. It is true that throughout the poem there are passages which indicate that he was not only learned[75] and

full of moral concern,[76] but also an accurate observer of phenomena in the natural world.[77] In light of this, the harsh nature of the Venus passage of Book IV seems all the more surprising.

There is, of course, considerable value in examining the historical background against which a writer lives in the attempt to understand and to come to terms with the attitudes expressed in his work. While this does not provide an explanation for the inner creative life of an artist, the nature of the world in which he lives is bound to affect it in some manner, even if he chooses to reject it and to ignore the events of his own time. Thus the cataclysmic events taking place during the late Republic cannot be entirely dismissed when one scrutinizes Book IV. during the lifetime of Lucretius, Rome passed through an era of extreme political upheaval, violence, and bloodshed. Since the probable date of Lucretius' birth was probably about 99 B.C., he was a young man at the time of the death of Marius (82 B.C.) and that of Sulla (79 B.C.). As a child, he lived through the Social War (90-88 B.C.); bloody civil conflicts went on intermittently throughout his life. It is likely that he was aware, to some extent at least, of the effects of the Catilinarian conspiracy as well as the complex political machinations and power-plays of Pompey, Caesar and Crassus. He may well have witnessed numerous atrocities and horrific scenes, such as the slaughter of thousands of Samnites defeated at the Battle of the Colline

Gate (82 B.C.), or the entire slave army of Spartacus crucified along the Via Appia (73 B.C.).[78]

As F. W. Minyard cogently argues, the whole Mediterranean world was in crisis during this period; the entire moral basis of the Roman Republic was destroyed, and consequently the words that designated its beliefs and values had lost their meaning:

> *Civitas* had lost its place as the center and source of understanding and purpose, had lost its power to organize life. Only some words and the shells of old habits, which we call the institutions of the Republic and their articulations in law, remained. The old structure of ideas, purposes and values no longer offered what everyone accepted as the nature of things.[79]

Clearly any humane person must have been deeply affected by the moral void that was created, as well as by the recurrent political crises, physical ravages and brutality around him. It is likely that for Lucretius such conditions must have been the source of any amount of fear, anger, and hatred; yet how is one to explain why these emotions seem to be channeled against women in Book IV? The historical background of the *De Rerum Natura* is, at best, only a piece in a puzzle that one can never hope to solve. All one can state is that, whatever its ultimate source, the Book IV Venus passage gives a pessimistic, even hopeless picture of sexual relationships from the viewpoint of the male lover. This dark current of troubled sexuality, which first seems to manifest itself in Roman poetry in this passage, is not, however, unique to Lucretius. As the subsequent chapters will show, it

resurfaces again and again in the work of other poets of the late Republic and the Augustan age. With Book IV of the *De Rerum Natura*, a new dark counter-aesthetic of male sexuality has been created.

1. I use the text found in Cyril Bailey's edition, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Oxford, 1947).

The following translation, as well as all others that appear in this text, are my own, and aim to be literal possible. Bailey's textual notes, as well as his translations of Lucretius' verses have, however, been an invaluable help in my understanding and interpretation of Lucretius.

2. The Invocation in the *Iliad* is seven lines in length; that in the *Odyssey*, ten.

3. Bailey, v. II, p. 591.

4. I was intuitively struck by the similarity between Lucretius' text and Botticelli's paintings on my first reading of Book I. I subsequently discovered that Bailey also sees this similarity; he does not, however, develop this point. (See Bailey, v. II, p. 593).

5. Dempsey (see Introduction, endnote 3) has made an invaluable study of the classical sources of the Primavera from the point of view of a Renaissance art historian.

6. A detailed account of the life and times of Botticelli is given by Julia Cartwright, *The Life and Art of Sandro Botticelli* (London, 1904), particularly in Chapter Five, p. 36-51, in which she discusses the intellectual life at the court of the Medici.

7. Cartwright, p. 63.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

9. Giuliano's tournament was held in 1469; the *Giostra* was written between 1476-1478. It was never completed; Giuliano was assassinated in 1478. (Cartwright, p. 66).

10. This translation from the Tuscan into English appears in Andre Chastel, *Botticelli* (Greenwich, Conn., 1958), p. 29.

11. Bailey, v. II, p. 589.

12. See, for example, the attack on the evils of *religio* in the passage on the sacrifice of Iphianassa (I, 80-101).

13. I, 44-49.

14. Bailey, v. I, p. 17.

15. E. E. Sikes, *Lucretius. Poet and Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1936), p. 120. Memmius served as tribune in B.C. 66, as praetor in 58, and as propraetor in Bithynia in 57, when

Catullus was part of his entourage. Whether Memmius was Lucretius' friend or patron is unknown, since it is not clear to what social class Lucretius belonged.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 122. Coins of the Memmii bear representations of Venus crowning Cupid.

17. D. E. W. Wormell, "The Personal World of Lucretius," in *Lucretius*, ed. D. R. Dudley (London, 1965), p. 39.

18. Bailey, v. II, p. 591.

19. *Ad Quintum fratrem* II, 9, 3.

20. In sculpture, too, the Venus Genetrix seems to be a stock image during the late Republic and the Augustan era. The best-known example of the type is probably the Venus Genetrix from the Louvre (Roman copy of a Greek original of the 5th c. B.C.), reproduced in Susan Woodford, *The Art of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 21.

21. See above, p. 8, for the special veneration paid to Venus by the Memmii *gens*.

22. Bailey, v. II, p. 592.

23. Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 1-6.

24. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 412-415.

25. Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, 470-473.

26. Bailey points out that these compound adjectives occur for the first and only time in Lucretius. (Bailey, v. II, p. 592).

27. Here I diverge from Cyril Bailey's interpretation of this phrase, which he renders as "wild beasts and cattle" (Bailey, v. I, p. 177).

28. That Botticelli could also work as an illustrator is demonstrated by his series of drawings depicting scenes from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Martin Bodmer Collection, Switzerland).

29. Neither the allegorical meaning of the canvas as a whole nor the significance of the individual figures within it has been clearly established. An account of the debate about its interpretation can be found in Cartwright, p. 68-72, and in L. D. and Helen Ettinger, *Botticelli* (London, 1976), p. 118-129, which discusses the interpretation of the painting as a neo-Platonic allegory. See Edgar Wind, in *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1968), and the more recent work by

Dempsey.

30. See the *Introduction* for my use of Jonathan Culler's term, "to read as a woman".

31. It is conceivable that Horace may have been inspired by these and the following lines on the passage of earthly seasons in his well-known Spring Ode, IV, 7.

32. Ovid, *Fasti* V, 193-204.

33. There is a strong resemblance to the likeness of Botticelli's Portrait of Giuliano de Medici (Berlin, Staatliche Museum), as well as to the figure tentatively identified as Giuliano in the *Adoration of the Magi* (Florence, Uffizi Gallery). See *The Complete Paintings of Botticelli* (New York, 1967), p. 90, for a tentative key to the contemporary figures from the Medici circle contained therein.

34. Ovid, *Fasti* V, 85-89.

35. The flowers in the painting have been identified as accurate representations of every species of wildflower native to Tuscany by Chastel, p. 29.

36. It is, in my opinion, this quality of remoteness that has suggested to one critic the ingenious theory that the Venus figure represents Simonetta Vespucci, whose portrait Botticelli had painted, waking up in Paradise after her premature death. (Cartwright, p. 68).

37. I am here transcribing Bailey's unsurpassable alliterative translation *verbatim*. (Bailey, *De Rerum Natura*, v. I, p. 177).

38. Wormell, p. 39, has also noted the connection between *Mavors* and *mors*.

39. *Odyssey*, VIII, 266-366.

40. Bailey, v. I, p. 179.

41. Cartwright, p. 72 and p. 87. Both figures resemble the portrait of Giuliano by Botticelli (Carrara Gallery, Bergamo), as well as a standing figure on the right side of the canvas in the *Adoration of the Magi* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) tentatively identified as Giuliano (see endnote 33).

42. The figure of Christ in the *Pieta* group in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan and that in the *Lamentation* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

43. While the translation of the passage is my own, I am again, indebted to the work of Cyril Bailey, as well as to that of Robert D. Brown in *Lucretius on Love and Sex* (Leiden, 1987).

44. Richard Minadeo, *The Lyre of Science* (Detroit, 1969) traces and explicates such major themes in the *De Rerum Natura* as tenets of the Epicurean system.

45. I, 937-938.

46. The poems of Sulpicia (probably a relative of Mesalla, Tibullus' patron), addressed a Cerinthus, are normally included as 3.8-3.18 in Book 3 of Tibullus' poetry. Guy Lee calls them "the work of a highly intelligent, emotional and independent person." Guy Lee, *Tibullus: Elegies*, 3rd. ed. (Leeds, 1990), p. 162.

47. According to Lucretius (and Epicurus), all bodies give out a kind of image made of very fine atoms, a *simulacrum* (or *eidolon* in Greek), which strikes the eyeball of the beholder. For Lucretius' explication of *simulacra*, see Book IV, 45-216. A *simulacrum* given off by a woman acts as the mechanical stimulus that acts upon a male to cause an erection.

48. Lucretius here expounds Epicurus' *pangenesis* theory of the production of semen, derived from Democritus (Brown, p. 183).

49. See the discussion on the problematic relationship of Epicurus' and Lucretius' thought on the issue of love, sex and marriage in Brown, p. 101-122. Epicurus seems to have written a treatise on love, *Peri Erotos*, which has been lost to posterity; Brown points out, however, that it is likely to have been a discussion of ideal love, not of sexual issues.

50. Brown, p. 118-119.

51. Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (New York, 1964), p. 223. Apparently Epicurus accepted women of the *hetaira* class (notably one Leontion, who seems to have had considerable intellectual ability), as well as those of the upper classes, into the community.

52. Very few fragments by Epicurus' hand have survived, and there is dispute about which ones are authentic. It is generally agreed that three letters to his disciples (possibly two), as well as a collection of short sayings, *Kuriai Doxai* (Principal Sayings) are genuine.

To quote Bailey on Epicurus' style: "The letter to Herodotus is written in a crabbed style, and is often very difficult to understand, the letter to Menoceus is in a more

lucid and graceful style, and the brief "Sayings" for the most part straightforward (Bailey, *De Rerum Natura*, v. I, p. 22.). Bailey does not mention the style of the third extant letter, that to Philodemus, since he is not convinced of its authenticity.

53. "τὸ γὰρ τῆσδ' οὐ προτιμήσω κακὸν
τὸ μὴ οὐ παρασχεῖν τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐμοὶ
δίκην τοσαύτην ὥστ' ἐμοὶ καλῶς ἔχειν." Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 48-50.

(I will not put her troubles above my enemies' paying a penalty so great that it will be pleasing to me.)

54. "Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachee
C'est Venus toute entiere a sa proie attachee." (Act I, scene 3).
Instead of a literal translation, I give Margaret Rawlings' fine version:
"No longer is it fever of the blood
Concealed within my veins, but She, herself,
Venus herself, entire, crouched on her prey." (Jean Racine, *Phedre*), trans. Margaret Rawlings (London, 1961, p. 53).

55. Brown points out the link of the Book IV passage with Lucilian satire (p. 137). He also notes on p. 131: "As for satire, Lucilius displays a misogynistic attitude in several fragments (e.g., 678-86 M), and it was probably he from whom Lucretius learned the technique of juxtaposing fanciful Greek and realistic Latin terms (a feature which he obviously cannot have borrowed from a Greek author)."

56. *Ibid.*, p. 259. Brown also points out that the adjective *thalassina* is Lucretius' own creation, found nowhere else.

57. Brown sees the following as characteristic features of satire: "small dramatic scenes and vignettes, parody, moral criticism, vivid physical detail, varied imagery and incisive vocabulary". He believes, however, that Lucretius avoids the "colloquialism, vulgarity, and informal organization" of Lucilian satire. (*Ibid.*, p. 137).

58. Semonides' poem of 118 lines (incomplete) equates six undesirable types of women with animals: pig, vixen, bitch, ass, ferret, mare, and monkey. Women are also compared pejoratively to clods of earth and to the changeable sea.

59. See Semonides, lines 80-93 which describe the ideal woman/mate, the bee (Melissa):
"τοίας γυναίκας ἀνδράσιν χαρίζεται
Ζεὺς τὰς ἀρίστας καὶ πολυφραδεστάτας."

(Such women are the finest and most thoughtful that Zeus bestows on man).

60. "The Lady's Dressing Room," in Jonathan Swift, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth, 1983), 448-452. The poem stresses the disgusting aspects of a woman's bodily functions that are concealed behind the excluding door of her bourdoir; its climax is line 118, "Oh, Celia, Celia, Celia shits!"

61. Brown, p. 297. Brown suggests that the woman is fumigating herself as part of a gynecological treatment.

62. "The mounting male" is Brown's unsurpassable translation of *Venerem salientem* (Brown, p. 159). He also points out that this term is a graphic farmer's word for sexual mounting" (p. 315).

63. For example, XI, 817-818; XIII, 831-832; XV, 351; XXII, 42, 66, 71, 76, 89, etc. Moreover, Helen reproaches herself for being a dog-face and a bitch (III, 180, and VI, 344); and Achilles insults Agamemnon in similar terms (I, 159, 225).

64. This assumption goes back to Parmenides and Empedocles, as well as some of the Hippocratic tracts, and was later taken up by Galen. For a discussion of genetic theory in the ancient world, see Brown, p. 320-321.

65. Most commentators on the coda do not feel that its tone belittles women in any manner, even if they are surprised by the harshness of Lucretius' tone in the rest of the Book IV Venus passage. Pierre Boyancé's comment is typical: "...et le lecteur, qui se souvient de ce qui a ete dit lus haut avec tant d'aprete des illusions de l'amour, est un peu surpris de cette psychologie maintenant plus objective et de ce ton plus indulgent." Pierre Boyance, *Lucrece et l'Epicurisme* (Paris, 1963), p. 211.

66. It is possible that the Venus section of Book IV lies at the root of the legend of Lucretius' madness and suicide caused by a love potion, which first appears in St. Jerome (Bailey, *De Rerum Natura*, v. I, p. 1), and recurs as late as the end of the nineteenth century in Alfred Lord Tennyson's narrative poem *Lucretius*.

67. It is possible that even primitive peoples conceived of a kind of reverse birth-process; for example, the earliest known image of Cybele, the Great Earth Mother-Goddess, from Catal Huyuk, shows a small head protruding from her vagina. While she may be shown in the act of giving birth, it has also been argued that this is actually a *rucksgeburt*: death

depicted as a return to the womb of the earth-mother. See p. 16 and pl. 5 in Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis. The Myth and the Cult* (London, 1977).

68. See the *Introduction to the Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford, 1991), p. 5-7, for an account of Irigaray's relationship to Lacan. After the publication of her second work *Speculum*, critical of the thinking of Lacan and his followers, she lost her post and was "put into quarantine" (p. 5) by the French psychological establishment of which she had been a member.

69. Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," trans. David Macey, in Whitford, p. 40-41.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

71. In an addition to Eusebius' *Chronicle* for A.D. 94 (or 93), St. Jerome states: *Titus Lucretius poeta nascitur, postea amatorio poculo in furorem versus, cum aliquot libros per intervallos insaniae conscripsisset, quos postea Cicero emendavit, propria se manu interfecit anno aetatis XLIII.* (Bailey, v. I, p. 1). (Titus Lucretius the poet was born; later, having drunk a love-potion, although he had written some books in the intervals between onsets of madness, he killed himself by his own hand at age 43).

72. See "Lucretius" (first published in 1868), in *The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Boston, 1898), p. 274-278.

73. The discussion of the nature and extent of Lucretius' madness has been a *leitmotiv* in Lucretian scholarship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See, for example, John Masson, *Lucretius, Epicurean and Poet* (London, 1907), p. 44-56; George Hadzits, *Lucretius and his Influence* (New York, 1963); Joseph Cuda, *The Ultimate Pleasure: Death and Immortality in the De Rerum Natura*, diss., Washington University, 1977), p. 3-5. Although Bailey does not develop this point, he believes that Lucretius might simply have suffered from bouts of depression (Bailey, v. I, p. 1-2).

74. Lucretius' dates are generally given as ca. 99 B.C. - 55 B.C. It is assumed that he was dead by 54 B.C., since Cicero refers to editing Lucretius' poem in a letter to his brother Quintus written in February of that year (Bailey, *De Rerum Natura*, v. I, p. 2). The other sources on Lucretius' life tend to be contradictory and possibly spurious. See Bailey, *op. cit.*, v. I, p. 1-2, for a brief summation of these.

75. See, for example, the description of the Athenian plague at the end of Book VI (1138-1286), which evidently echoes Thucydides, Book II, XLVII-LIV; or the summation, at times ironic, of the argument of several pre-Socratic thinkers (Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras) in Book I, 645-919.

76. See, for example, the Iphianassa passage, Book I, 80-110; or the diatribe in Book V (1194-1240) against men's superstitious fear of gods: "O genus infelix humanum, talia divis/cum tribuit facta ac iras adiunxit acerbas" (Oh, wretched race of men, which has attributed such deeds to gods, and added harsh ire to them, 1194-1195).

77. See, for example the vivid description of the rushing winds and water of a storm (I, 271-297); or the discussion of optical illusion (IV, 386-452); or the observation of the nature of noises animals and birds make under varying circumstances (V, 1059-1092).

78. A moving synopsis of the catastrophic historical events that took place during Lucretius' life-span is given by Constant Martha, *Le Poeme de Lucrece* (Paris, 1909), p. 25-27. One may note that Martha's text was written under the shadow of World War One.

79. J. D. Minyard, *Lucretius and the Late Republic* (Leiden, 1985), p. 2.

CHAPTER 2: A SEA-CHANGE INTO SOMETHING NEW AND STRANGE

All lyric poets are hard to understand, but Catullus is almost impossible.

Gilbert Highet

In noctis spatium miserorum vulnera durant.

Petronius

Catullus 63: The Attis Poem.

Super alta vectus Attis celeri rate maria,
Phrygium ut nemus citato cupide pede tetigit
adiitque opaca silvis redimita loca deae,
stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, vagus animis,
devolsit ilei acuto sibi pondera silice.
itaque, ut relicta sensit sibi membra sine viro,
etiam recente terrae sola sanguine maculans,
niveis citata cepit manibus leve typanum,
typanum tuum, Cybebe, tua, mater initia,
quatiens terga tauri teneris cava digitis
canere haec suis adorta est tremebunda comitibus.
"agite ite ad alta, Gallae, Cybeles nemora simul,
simul ite, Dindymneae dominae vaga pecora,
aliena quae petentes velut exsules loca
sectam meam exsecutae duce me mihi comites
rapidum salim tulistis truculentaque pelagi.
et corpus euirastis Veneris nimio odio;
hilarate erae citatis erroribus animum.
mora tarda mente cedat: simul ite, sequimini
Phrygiam ad domum Cybebes, Phrygia ad nemora deae,
ubi cymbalum sonat vox, ubi tympana reboant,
tibicen ubi canit Phryx curuo grave calamo,
ubi capita Maenades ui iaciunt hedgerigae,
ubi sacra sancta acutis ululalibus agitant,
ubi suevit illa divae volitare uaga cohors,
quo nos decet citatis celerare tripudiis."
simul haec comitibus Attis cecinit notha mulier,
thiasus repente linguis trepidantibus ululat,
leve tympanum remugit, cava cymbala recrepant,
uiridem citus adit Idam properante pede chorus.
furibunda simul anhelans uaga uadit animam agens
comitata tympano Attis per opaca nemora dux,
veluti iuuenca uitans onus indomita iugi,
rapidae ducem sequuntur Gallae properipedem.
itaque, ut domum Cybebes tetigere lassulae,
nimio e labore somnum capiunt sine Cerere,
piger his labante languore oculos sopor operit,
abit in quite molli rabidus furor animi.

abit in quite molli rabidus furor animi.
sed ubi oris aurei Sol radiantibus oculis
lustrauit aethera album, sola dura, mare ferum,
pepulit noctis umbras uegetis sonipedibus,
ibi Somnus excitam Attin fugies citus abiit;
trepidante eum recepit dea Pasithea sinu.
ita de quiete molli rapida sine rabie,
simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recoluit,
liquidaque mente vidit sine quis ubique foret,
animo aestuante rusum reditum ad vada tetulit.
ibi maria vasta visens lacrimantibus oculis,
patriam allocuta maestast ita voce miseriter.
"patria o mea creatrix, patria o mea genetrix,
ego quam miser relinquens, dominos ut erifugae
famuli solent, ad Idae tetuli nemora pedem,
ut aput nivem et ferarum gelida stabula forem,
et earum opaca adirem furibunda latibula,
ubinam aut quibus locis te positam, patria, reor?
cupit ipsa pupula ad te sibi derigere aciem,
rabie fera carens dum breve tempus animus est.
egone a mea remota haec ferar in nemora domo?
patria, bonis, amicis, genitoribus abero?
abero foro, palaestra, stadio et gymnasiis?
miser a miser, querendum est etiam atque etiam, anime.
quod enim genus figuraest, ego non quod obierim?
ego mulier, ego adolescens, ego ephebus, ego puer;
ego gymnasi fui flos; ego eram decus olei;
mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida,
mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat,
linquendum ubi esset orto mihi sole cubiculum.
ego nunc deum ministra et Cybeles famula ferar?
ego Maenas, ego mihi pars, ego vir sterilis ero?
ego viridis algida Idae nive amicta loca colam?
ego vitam agam sub altis Phrygiae columinibus?
ubi cerva silvicultrix, ubi aper nemoriuagus?
iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet."
roseis ut huic labellis sonitus <citus> abiit,
geminas deorum ad aures nova nuntia referens,
ibi iuncta iuga resoluens Cybele leonibus
laeuum pecoris hostem stimulans ita loquitur.
"agedum", inquit, "age ferox <i>, fac ut hunc furor <agitet>,
fac uti furoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat,
mea libere nimis qui fugere imperia cupit,
age caede terga cauda, tua verbera patere,
fac cuncta mugienti fremitu loca retonent,
rutilam ferox torosa cervice quate iubam."
ait haec minax Cybebe religatque iuga manu:
ferus ipse sese adhortans rapidum incitat animo,
vadit, fremit, refringit virgulta pede uago.
at ubi umida albicantis loca litoris adiit,
teneramque uidit Attin prope marmora pelagi,
facit impetum. illa demens fugit in nemora fera;

ibi semper omne vitae spatium famula fuit.
    dea, magna dea, Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi,
procul a mea tuos sit furor omnis, era, domo:
alios age incitatos, alios age rabidos.[1]

    When Attis, carried over the deep seas in a swift craft,
reached the Phrygian grove, hastening on lustful feet,
and came to the shady haunts of the Goddess,
girded by forests--
there, goaded by raging madness, wandering in his mind,
he cut the weights from his groin with a sharp flint.
And so, as she felt her limbs bereft of manhood,
still spattering the soil of the earth
with freshly-shed blood,
she seized a light timbrel in her hand--your timbrel, Cybele,
for your holy rites, Mother--and striking the concave hide
from a bull's back with her delicate fingers, trembling,
she began to intone thus to her comrades:
    "Go on, Gallae, go at once to the tall groves of Cybele;
go on at once, you wandering flock of the mistress of Dindyme;
seeking alien lands like exiles, you have followed my path,
my comrades; with me as your leader, you have endured
the swift salt waters and the grim open sea,
and you unmanned your bodies through too much hatred of Venus;
delight the spirit of you mistress with your swift mazings.
Let slow delay withdraw from your minds;
go on, at once; follow me to the Phrygian haunt of Cybebe,
to the Phrygian groves of the Goddess;
where the noise of cymbals resounds; where timbrels re-echo;
where a Phrygian flutist deeply intones a curved pipe;
where ivy-crowned Maenads madly toss their heads;
where they brandish sacred offerings with a sharp-pitched
wailing; where that wandering troop of the Goddess
is wont to hover;
whither it is proper for us to hasten
with swift wild dances."
    As soon as the half-woman Attis declaimed this
to her comrades, at once the chorus wails with awkward tongue,
the light timbrel moans, the hollow cymbals rattle,
the swift chorus approaches green Ida with hastening feet.
At once their maddened leader strides on,
mazing and panting, gasping for breath,
followed by the drumbeat,
through the dusky groves, just like an untamed heifer,
shunning the burden of a yoke; the swift Gallae
follow their leader on hastening feet.
And so, as soon as the little weary ones have reached
the haunt of Cybele, they fall asleep,
having striven too much, without any food;
slow slumber overwhelms their eyes
as they slip into sleep; in gentle quiet,
the rabid madness of their minds withdraws.

But when golden-faced Sun with shining eyes
purified the white air, the hard earth, the wild sea,
and drove off the shades of night with his lively steeds--
then Sleep, swiftly fleeing, departed from maddened Attis;
the Goddess Pasithea received him on her trembling breast.
Thus, when in the soft quiet, free of swift madness,
Attis recalled her own deeds in her heart,
and, with a clear mind, saw what she now lacked
and where she was--
with seething mind, she turned about and reached the sea.
There, gazing at the water with weeping eyes,
she addressed her country sadly, in a mourning voice:
"Fatherland, oh my creatress,
fatherland, oh my mother,
whom I--wretched creature--abandoned, just like a slave
fleeing from a master; I touched the groves of Ida
with my feet, so that I would be amid the snow
and the frozen haunts of wild beasts;
so that I, in my madness, would approach their dusky lairs;
oh, fatherland, where, or in what place,
alas, do I think that you can be found?
The very pupils of my eyes lust to turn their gaze to you,
while, for a brief space, my mind is free
from a savage madness.
Will I, far from my home, be borne into these far-off groves?
Will I be gone from fatherland, from earthly goods,
from friends, from parents?
Will I be absent from the forum,
from my wrestling-school, from stadium and gymnasium?
Wretch, oh wretch! we must mourn again and again, my soul!
For what is the shape of my being, what have I not lived
through?
I--a woman; I--a young man; I--a youth; I--a boy?
I was the flower of the exercise-ground;
I was the glory of the ring;
My doors were busy, my threshold was warm,
my house was crowned
with garlands of blossoms when I left my bed at sunrise.
Will I now seem the servant of Gods and Cybele's handmaid?
Will I be a Maenad; I--but a part of me; I--an unmanned man?
Will I tend the cold grounds, covered with snow,
of verdant Ida?
Will I pass my life beneath the tall columns of Phrygia,
with the wood-loving deer, with the grove-wandering boar?
Now, now what I did pains me, now, now I repent."
As these sounds swiftly fled from her rosy lips,
bringing back these strange news
to the twinned ears of the gods
then Cybele, loosing the yoke joining her lions,
and goading the enemy of flocks on her left side, spoke thus:
"Go on, then," said she, "go, fierce one, make his madness
stir him,

make his madness, as it strikes, bring him to my groves--
him, who desires so much to escape my rule; go on,
lash your back with your tail, submit to the blows;
make every place resound with your moaning roar;
shake the red mane on your powerful neck, fierce one!"
    Cybebe, full of menace, speaks thus,
and unties the yoke with her hand; the wild beast,
rousing up his own spirit, works himself up to speed:
he strides, he roars, he crushes the thickets
with his mazing feet.
But when he comes to the watery spaces of the whitening shore,
and sees delicate Attis by the marmoreal sea, he makes a rush.
She flees, demented, into the wild groves;
there evermore, for all the rest of her life,
she was her handmaid.
    Goddess, great Goddess, Cybele; Goddess,
mistress of Dindyme:
may all madness sent by you stay far from my dwelling--
Drive other men crazy, drive other men mad.

The Unique Nature of the Attis Poem.

It would be tempting to explain away the troubled vision of male sexuality which is revealed in Book IV of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* as a manifestation of psychosexual dysfunction, temporary or permanent, on the part of its author,[2] were this vision not echoed in the poetry of his contemporary Catullus. It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how Catullus' vision of the male comes at times surprisingly close to that of Lucretius' portrayal of his disturbed male lover, full of fear of the female sex. To date, much work has already been done--coming to widely divergent conclusions--on the male "I" figure which Catullus creates in the well-known short lyrics dealing with the figure of Lesbia; this chapter will examine, rather, how Catullus treats the

male figure in *carmen* 63, an original re-vision of the Cybele and Attis myth. This chapter will first summarize the mythological and artistic background on which Catullus could have drawn in order to shape this unusual poem; after a detailed reading of *carmen* 63, this chapter will briefly suggest how this literary work may have had some influence on subsequent visual art.

Not only within the corpus of Catullus' work, but also within the history of Roman poetry, the Attis poem stands apart, defying classification. Its impact is undeniable; reactions to the poem from scholars range from a refusal to acknowledge its existence[3] to lavish praise. Kenneth Quinn calls it "the most remarkable poem in Latin";[4] Phyllis Young Forsyth goes even further: "Poem 63 (the "Attis") is not just one of the finest poems written in Latin, it is also one of the most memorable poems ever written in any language."[5] Viewed from any angle, it is a unique and disturbing work of art.

That Catullus was working in an experimental mode in *carmen* 63 is indicated by his use of the highly unusual galliambic metre, which, according to Quinn, imitates the "dialogue of a kettledrum and cymbals."[6] To write a poem of ninety-three lines in this difficult metre is nothing less than a *tour-de-force*. Catullus' choice of subject matter--a self-castration that results in surprising gender-bending--is equally unusual; so, too, is his reworking of the traditional

sources at his disposal. In order to grasp how truly original a work Catullus has created in the mini-drama of *carmen* 63, it is essential first to consider the background from which the poet has shaped his own remarkable version of the Cybele-Attis story.

The Goddess Cybele.

The mythical figure of the goddess Cybele, the female protagonist in Catullus' mini-drama, originally seems to have embodied the primitive concept of Earth as a female deity, the sacred giver and sustainer of every form of life, plant, animal, and human. The concept of Earth as a divinity must have come into being at a very early point in human pre-history; some form of the Earth-Mother archetype appears, under a myriad of names, in virtually every primitive society of which posterity has a record.[7] To trace the permutations and evolution of this deity is the work of a mythographer, an undertaking beyond the scope of this investigation; for the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to note that Cybele is the name by which this archetypal Earth deity first came to be known in Asia Minor, thereafter in Rome, and eventually in all parts of her Empire.[8]

The earliest extant representation of Cybele which shows the iconographic atributes that subsequently allow one to identify this Goddess is a terra cotta figure dated to

approximately 6000 B. C. It was discovered in the course of J. Mellaart's excavations at Çatal Hüyük (in present-day Turkey), a site located in the geographical area which was eventually to be known as Phrygia, and later became a part of the Roman province of Asia Minor.[9] Judged by present-day aesthetic conventions, and in comparison to later representations of this deity, this rounded and large-breasted figure appears crude, and yet powerful. In the words of M. J. Vermaseren, the foremost authority on the cult of Cybele and Attis:

> The statuette commmands our attention, for the artist, living in a world that knew no writing, managed arrestingly to convey how people in those days looked upon the Goddess. She is seated on a rocky throne; her breasts, hips and thighs are extravagant; she is the prototype of primitive and crude womanliness.[10]

The impression of feminine potency is heightened by the small head emerging from her vagina: the Goddess is either giving birth, or receiving someone who has completed his life-cycle back into her womb in a kind of reverse-birth;[11] it is possible that this representation suggests both processes.

The representation shows, for the first time, the two iconographic attributes which can be used to establish the identity of this Goddess in later images; these are developed and elaborated in various ways over the course of time, depending on the taste of the era and on the geographical area where the images originate. These attributes are: first, the presence of one or two feline beasts (apparently panthers or leopards, later also lions), here shown seated at the sides of

the deity; and, second, a crown, which here is a flat disc that sits on the back of her head. In later representations the felines may be depicted as forming the arm-rests of her throne, sitting or standing next to the Goddess, rearing,[12] or drawing a cart in which the goddess sits.[13] There are in existence several attractive sculptures, perhaps shaped with a gentle sense of humor, which show a large feline lying, rather like an outsized tabby, in the lap of the deity.[14] The flat disc-crown shown on the head of the Catal Huyuk terra cotta later develops into a high *polos* in sculptures which originate in Asia Minor and on the Greek mainland, and into the elaborate turreted mural crown that is typically seen in Roman images of the goddess. In the Graeco-Roman tradition, she is also often shown holding a *patera*, a flat offering bowl, and/or a *tympanum*, a kind of tambourine.

The historical evolution of this goddess, a subject beyond the scope of this chapter, has already been thoroughly discussed both by G. Showerman and by M. J. Vermaseren.[15] It should, however, be noted that the name Cybele, which eventually comes to be used in the Roman context, has ancient roots in Asia Minor. A priest of Kubabat is mentioned in Assyrian cuneiform writing (1st century of the 2nd millenium B. C.)[16] The name Kubaba occurs in Hittite sources (late 2nd millenium B. C.), and an Akkadian document (14th or 13th c. B. C.) mentions the Lady Kubaba, Mistress of Charchemish, who appears to be the same Goddess that was later adopted by the

apparently yields no information about this deity, she reappears thereafter in sculptural representations throughout Asia Minor. To judge by the large number which survive, dating from this time onward, her cult came to be widely practiced in this geographical area.[18] By the Hellenistic period, Sardis and Pessinus had become the main centers of her worship.[19] In the course of time, the Goddess came to be associated particularly with the uncultivated regions surrounding Mt.Ida and Mt.Dindymus in Phrygia.[20] Thus she seems to have evolved from a fertility deity into one which governs nature in its wild state: a tradition of which Catullus makes use in *carmen* 63.

Given the geographical location of mainland Greece and her links with the settlements on the coast of Asia Minor, it is not surprising that some form of the cult of this Goddess eventually spread throughout the Greek world. In the Greek context, however, this Asiatic deity seems to have become conflated with the indigenous μήτερ θεών, Mother of the Gods.[21] Originally this deity was apparently known as Kybele, Kybebe, or Kybelis only in the Greek settlements in Asia Minor, but there is evidence that these names also were known on the mainland by about the sixth century B. C.[22] Nonetheless, whether she was known as Mother of the Gods or by one of the variants of the name Cybele, she can be identified in visual representations from Asia Minor, from the mainland, and from the Greek islands[23] by the distinctive iconographic

and from the Greek islands[23] by the distinctive iconographic attributes of feline beasts and crown.[24]

How important the cult of this goddess became on mainland Greece, possibly retaining some distinctively Asiatic aspects, is not clear. G. Showerman claims that the cult was relatively wide-spread in Thrace and Boeotia by the sixth century B. C., but that it never became very popular in Athens.[25] M. J. Vermaseren, on the other hand, points out that archaeological evidence gained since Showerman's early but ground-breaking research (dating from the turn of this century) indicates that a Metroon, a temple to the Mother Goddess, may have existed on the Agora as early as the fifth century B. C.[26] Whether cult practices at this sanctuary retained any distinctive Asiatic characteristics is unknown. Although there is some disagreement among archaeologists about details concerning the Metroon,[27] it is generally agreed that the sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods was destroyed and subsequently rebuilt several times, in different locations within Athens, during the course of the following centuries. This, at least, suggests an enduring interest in the cult on the part of Athenians. Excavations at the port of Piraeus have also uncovered at least one sanctuary dedicated to Cybele,[28] dating to the fourth century B. C. Since epigraphic evidence indicates that the sanctuary was privately supported by foreigners,[29] it is possible that cult practices at the port sanctuary may have been different from those in

The existence of the Homeric *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods, Εἰς μήτερα θεῶν* (possibly 7th or 6th century B. C.), whatever its actual provenance or exact date, also suggests that some form of the cult must have been relatively popular in the Greek culture. This short poem or prelude is noteworthy because it indicates that the Mother Goddess must have retained, at least at this early stage, and in some parts of Greece, traces of her original Asiatic character:

Μίτερα μοὶ παντῶν τε θεῶν παντῶν τε ἀνθρόπων
ὔμνει, Μοῦσα λιγεία, Διός θυγάτηρ μεγαλοίο,
ἣ κροταλῶν τυπανῶν τ'ἰαχησῦν τε βρόμος ἀυλῶν
ἔυαδε ἤδε λυκῶν κλαγγή χαροπῶν τε λεοντῶν
οὔρεα τ'ἤχεντα καὶ ὑλήεντες ἔναυλοι.
Καὶ συ μὲν οὕτω χαίρε θέαι θ'αμα πάσαι ἀοίδασῃ.

Clear-voiced Muse, daughter of Great Zeus,
sing to me of the Mother of all gods and men;
the sound of rattles and drums is pleasing to her,
together with the shrilling of pipes,
and the howling of wolves,
and of flashing-eyed lions, with the hills
and their wooded haunts resounding.
And so, hail to you in my song,
and hail to all the goddesses.

The percussion instruments mentioned in the *Hymn* are associated with orgiastic cult practices native to Asia Minor.[30] The reference to wolves and lions suggests the link of this deity with nature in its wild state; the mention of lions is particularly significant since the lion, or a similar beast, is, as we have seen, one of the two distinctive iconographic attributes by which the goddess is identified.

The large number of surviving sculptures representing this deity found throughout greater Greece, dating from the eighth century B. C. through the Hellenistic period, provides

eighth century B. C. through the Hellenistic period, provides more evidence for the existence of a wide-spread and enduring cult.[31] M. J. Vermaseren also points out that the cult of the Mother of the Gods may appear to be somewhat less prominent than it actually was as a result of her resemblance to other deities associated with nature and the earth, particularly Rhea and Demeter.[32] In some shrines the Mother of the Gods, clearly identifiable by her distinctive attributes, is, in fact, represented side by side with one or the other;[33] it is not suprising that these three goddesses should at times be confused or conflated.

It has been argued that the Asiatic cult of the Mother of the Gods was repugnant to the Greek mind because of the tradition of eunuch priests in her service, a phenomenon apparently derived from Semitic practices.[34] There is, in fact, no evidence that such a tradition ever existed in the cult of the Mother Goddess on the mainland. It is possible, however, that the Greeks of Asia Minor did adopt this practice, given the confluence of several Near-Eastern cultural traditions in this relatively small geographical area, as well as the influence and proximity of Persia, where eunuchs could rise to positions of power and influence. Nonetheless, the first reference in Greek to eunuch priests of Cybele, known as Galloi, occurs relatively late, about 200 B. C,. in epigrams found in the *Anthologia Palatina*. Here they are called γόητης (sorcerer), ἡμιθηλύς (half-woman) ἀμφίπολος

(chamber-servant), and θαλαμηπόλος (dweller in a chamber).[35] There is, moreover, nothing to indicate the ethnic origins of these priests; it is possible that these priests were foreigners, as they were later to be in the Roman Republic.

Cybele/Magna Mater in Rome.

It is possible, then, that in most parts of mainland Greece the worship of this deity took on a form somewhat different from that practiced in Asia Minor. This is worth noting because this Goddess, unlike the Olympian deities, was not "a legacy of the Greek race" to Rome, to use Showerman's apt term;[36] the Mother of the Gods was imported into Rome directly from Asia Minor in 204 B. C., and welcomed as the new savior and protector of the city with appropriate pomp and circumstance. Thus the cult practices in Rome must originally have reflected Phrygian ones. The story of the reception of the Goddess into Rome is recounted by Livy.[37]

In brief, the Second Punic War had been dragging on for about twelve years. Since Rome, already in a state of crisis, was also being plagued by recurrent showers of meteorites, the Senate sought advice from the prophetic Sibylline leaves in order to discover how to deal with this disastrous situation. The Sibylline leaves declared that the Goddess of Mt.Ida must be brought to Rome before the Romans could hope to defeat the invaders on her shores. Accordingly, after appropriate

official negotiations on the part of Roman envoys with King Attalus of Pergamon, the Goddess, represented by a black stone, was brought from Pessinus to Rome.[38] The Goddess was to be received formally into the city by the best man in Rome, adjudged by the Senate to be P. Cornelius Scipio. Livy gives the following account of the arrival of the Goddess from Pergamon:

> P. Cornelius cum omnibus matronis Ostiam obviam ire deae iussus, isque eam de nave accipere et in terram elatam tradere ferendam matronis. Postquam navis ad ostium amnis Tiberini accessit, sicut erat iussus, in salum nave evectus ab sacerdotibus deam accepit extulitque in terram. Matronae primores civitatis, interquas unius Claudiae Quintae est nomen, accepere; cui dubia, ut traditur, antea fama clariorem ad posteros tam religioso ministerio pudicitiam fecit. Eae per manus, succedentes deinde aliae aliis, omni obviam effusa civitate, turibulis ante ianuas positis qua praeferabatur atque accenso ture, precantibus ut volens propitiaque urbem Romanam iniret, in aedem Victoriae quae est in Palatio, pertulere deam pridie idus Apriles; isque dies festus fuit. Populus frequens dona deae in Palatium tulit, lectisterniumque et ludi fuere, Megalesia appellata.[39]

> Publius Cornelius was commanded to go to meet the Goddess together with all the matrons, and he was to receive her from the ship; and, once she was carried out to land, to hand her over to be carried by the matrons. After the ship had reached the mouth of the river Tiber, he was taken by boat into the open sea, received the Goddess from her priests, and carried her out to land, as he had been ordered to do. The foremost matrons of the community, among whom the name of Claudia Quinta is particularly noteworthy, received her. Claudia's reputation, previously dubious, as they say, made her chastity all the more famous to posterity by such a devout service. The women then passed her hand to hand, one after another, while the whole citizenry poured forth to meet them, with incense-burners placed on the doorways past which she was borne, and incense was lighted, with prayers that she would enter Rome willingly and with favor. They carried the Goddess into the Temple of Victory, which is on the Palatine, on the day before the Ides of April, and that was a festal day. Throngs of people brought gifts for the Goddess to the Palatine; there was a *lectisternium* and there were games, called the Megalesia.

A permanent temple on the Palatine to house the new Goddess was dedicated a few years later, in 191 B. C.[40]

The reception of the Goddess into Rome may have served more than one purpose. First, Rome acquired a useful political alliance in Asia Minor by establishing a relationship with the ruling dynasty of Pergamon. Furthermore, the importing of the Goddess may have been an act of clever patriotic propaganda: the ancient ties of Rome to her original legendary homeland, Troy, also located in Asia Minor, were thus reasserted. Livy's passage, moreover, establishes a specific connection between the newly-imported divinity and two of the great patrician families in Rome, the Scipiones and the Claudii; the association of these clans with a new deity, efficacious in freeing Rome from her troubled situation, would surely have improved their power and influence in Rome. Livy seems, in fact, to be emphasizing the aristocratic and respectable nature of the new cult.

While there is a large amount of documentation concerning the worship of this Goddess from the first centuries of the Empire, practically nothing is known about cult practices during that of the Republic. There are several possible reasons for this. First, the Magna Mater or Mater Idaea, the titles by which she was most commonly known in Rome at this time, was attended by foreign eunuch priests native to Phrygia, "celebrating foreign ceremonies in a foreign language,"[41] who are likely to have formed a relatively self-

contained community. Furthermore, the rites of the Magna Mater seem not to have been practiced in public, but normally confined to the precinct of her temple, except during the Megalensia, the annual festival commemorating the Great Mother's reception into Rome.[42] It must also be noted that Roman citizens were excluded from priesthood in the cult until the reign of Claudius; [43] H. H. Scullard points out that, during the period of the Republic, no Roman citizen was even allowed to walk in the processions honoring Cybele during the Megalensia.[44] It is likely that official records would have been kept--and some might have survived--had prominent members of the citizenry acted in an official sacerdotal capacity in the cult. Moreover, since there is no known tradition of eunuchism in native Roman religious practices, it has been also been plausibly argued that the practice of castration on religious grounds was unacceptable to Roman society, and that Romans were repelled by, and tended to avoid, the exotic foreign priests. Valerius Maximus mentions the unusual case of a certain Genucius, the first known Roman citizen to have castrated himself in order to enter the priesthood of the Great Mother; in 101 B. C. he was refused a hearing a before the consul Mamercus on the grounds that he was neither a man or a woman.[45]

During the period of the Republic, the festival of the Great Mother took place on April 4, and was followed by another celebration on April 10, the anniversary of the

installation of Magna Mater in her temple. The period between these two days, known as the Megalensia, was a major holiday in Rome. On April 4 there was a public procession of the foreign eunuch priests who served the Great Mother; they were allowed to collect money among spectators on behalf of their cult at this time. The procession was followed by sacrifices and a *lavatio*, the ritual washing of the image of the goddess.[46] During the Megalensia, there were horse-races and performances of plays for the entertainment of the masses,[47] and banquets known as *mutitationes* were given by patricians for each other; this suggests that the cult of the Goddess retained some of its original aristocratic connections, even if Roman citizens could not act as state priests in the cult.[48] That these banquets must have been luxurious, if not extravagant, is indicated by the existence of a *senatus consultum* of 161 B. C. which limited the expenses in giving them to 120 *asses*, and forbade the use of excessively elaborate silver plate and of imported wines.[49]

Some evidence about the public aspects of the cult as it was practiced in Rome during the lifetime of Catullus can be gleaned from the writings of two of his contemporaries, Cicero and Lucretius. In the *De Legibus*, Cicero voices his disapproval of collecting alms to support religious cults, arguing that this practice not only depletes people's finances, but also fills their minds with superstition. He yet seems to make an exception for the priests of the Great Mother

during the Megalensia.[50] It is, of course, possible that Cicero may have felt a genuine reverence for the cult of the Magna Mater; more cynically, can one detect here a symptom of the special interest that the ambitious *novus homo* may have had in a cult connected specifically with the aristocracy?

Lucretius, in a vivid passage in Book II of the *De Rerum Natura*, is our chief source of information about the public processions held in honor of the Great Mother. Despite his hatred of official religion and its practices,[51] he seems to feel genuine reverence for the concept of this Goddess, whom he envisions as a metaphor for the Earth itself:

Quare Magna deum Mater Materque ferarum
et nostri genetrix haec dicta est corporis una.
Hanc veteres Graium docti cecinere poetae
sedibus in curru biiugos agitare leones,
aeris in spatio magnam pendere docentes
tellurem neque posse in terra sistere terram.
adiunxere feras, quia quamvis effera proles
officiis debet molliri victa parentum.
murali caput summum cinxere corona,
eximiis munita locis quia sustinet urbes;
quo nunc insigni per magnas praedita terras
horrifice fertur divinae Matris imago.
hanc variae gentes antiquo more sacrorum
Idaeam vocitant Matrem Phrygias catervas
dant comites, quia primum ex illis finibus edunt
per terrarum orbem fruges coepisse creari.
Gallos attribuunt, quia, numen qui violarint
Matris et ingrati genitoribus inventi sint,
significare volunt indignos esse putandos,
vivam progeniem qui in oras luminis edant.
tympana tenta tonant palmis et cymbala circum
concava, raucisono minantur cornua cantu,
et Phrygio stimulat numero cava tibia mentis,
telaque praeportant violenti signa furoris,
ingratos animos atque impia pectora volgi
contererre metu quae possint numina divae.
ergo cum primum magnas invecta per urbis
munificat tacita mortalis muta salute,
aere atque argento sternunt iter omne viarum,
largifica stipe ditantes, ninguntque rosarum

floribus umbrantes Matrem comitumque catervam.
his armata manus, Curetas nomine Grai
quos memorant, Phrygias inter si forte catervas
ludunt in numerumque exultant sanguine laeti,
terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas,
Dictaeos referunt Curetas qui Iovis illum
vagitum in Creta quondam ocultasse feruntur,
cum pueri circum puerum pernice chorea
armati in numerum pulsarent aeribus aera,
ne Saturnus eum malis mandaret adeptus
aeternum daret Matri sub pectore volnus.
propterea Magnam armati Matrem comitantur,
aut quia significant divam praedicere ut armis
ac virtute velint patriam defendere terram
praesidioque parent decorique parentibus esse.[52]

Therefore she is called the Great Mother of the Gods
and the Mother of wild beasts,
and the only creatress of our bodies.
The learned poets of the Greeks of old
have sung of her, urging on double-yoked lions
while seated in her chariot--
showing that the great earth hung suspended
in an expanse of air, and that the earth cannot stand on
earth.
They have yoked together savage beasts,
because, no matter how wild her offspring,
they must be made more gentle,
overcome by the care of their elders.
They have wreathed the top of her head with a mural crown,
for she sustains cities securely in chosen places;
endowed with this emblem, the image of the divine Mother
is borne throughout the wide lands, inspiring awe.
Various nations call her the Idaean Mother,
according to the ancient custom of her sacred rites;
and they give her Phrygian troops as attendants,
because, they say, that out of that region,
grain first came, to spread throughout the world.
They associate with her the Galli,
because they wish to show that those who have violated
the holy spirit of the Mother, and have been found
to be ungrateful to their forebears,
must be considered unworthy to bring forth
living offspring into the shores of light.
Here is an armed troop, whom the Greeks style
by the name of Curetes. When perchance they sport
among the Phrygian bands, and leap about in measure
because of her divinity, joyful from blood,
shaking the terrifying crests on their heads,
they recall the Curetes of Dicte, who, they say,
had once upon a time concealed the wailing of Jove on Crete;
when armed boys around boys, in a nimble dance,

struck bronze on bronze in rhythm, lest Saturn,
seizing him in his jaws, devour him,
and wound the Mother in her heart.
Therefore they accompany the Great Mother;
or it is because they show that they praise the Goddess,
seeing that they wish to defend the land of their fathers,
and intend to be a protection and an ornament for their forebears.

This passage is valuable not only because it indicates what the Roman citizenry saw of the cult in its public aspect during the late Republic; it also shows how a sophisticated and learned Roman could intellectually interpret and give meaning to this deity. To judge by what Lucretius says, the processions in honor of the Great Mother were accompanied by raucous music, the quality of which the poet may well have been trying to emulate by his repeated use of alliteration (618-620, tympana tenta tonant palmis et cymbala circum/concava, raucisonoque minantur cornua cantu/et Phrygio stimulat numero cava tibia mentis). Evidently the clangor of the instruments was intensified by repeated clashing of weapons on the part of attendants playing the part of the legendary Curetes, who are said to have drowned out the crying of the infant Zeus/Jupiter to save him from his father Saturn. The presence of the Curetes in the procession of the Great Mother implies that, by Lucretius' (and Catullus') lifetime, the Roman cult of the Phrygian deity had also taken in elements borrowed from the Greek mythical tradition. This connection of Zeus with the Great Mother also suggests that, in the Roman tradition, as in Greece, she was closely identified with Rhea.

Interestingly, Lucretius does not stress the Great Mother's relationship with nature in its wild aspects, but emphasizes her civilizing and benign influence--a far cry from how his contemporary Catullus presents her. Her traditional lions are mentioned in the passage, but only to demonstrate that even the wildest and fiercest beings are capable of being made gentler (664-665). Her mural crown (606-607) represents her as the sustainer of cities: centers of civilization. Even the Galli take on a benign significance, curiously foreshadowing what a modern Western reader might relate to the Christian notion of self-sacrifice: they seem to have made a gift of their manhood to expiate the wrong-doing of those who have violated the sanctity of the Mother as Earth (614-616). The Goddess gives the gift of grain (611-613), and silently blesses mankind (625). The passage ends on a patriotic Roman note: the clashing weaponry of her attendants indicates that they will bravely defend their fatherland and cause their forebears to take pride in them (640-644). Thus in Lucretius' lines the Goddess has not only been rationalized, but also Romanized. And yet, vivid and informative as the passage is, it is merely conventional when compared to his contemporary Catullus' original and dark vision of the Great Mother.

The Figure of Attis.

So far no mention has been made of the mythical figure of

Attis, the main protagonist of *carmen* 63, who, after Catullus' lifetime, came to be closely associated with the cult of the Great Mother. While the earliest recorded Attis legends, like her cult, also originate in Asia Minor, they originally show little or no connection with the Goddess. The earliest version of an Attis legend is that recounted by Herodotus (fifth century B. C.), apparently to demonstrate the inexorable nature of Fate.[53] Atys, as Herodotus calls him, is the newly-wed son of King Croesus of Lydia, who has a prophetic dream: his son will meet his doom by means of an iron spear. Croesus tries to outwit Fate by removing all weaponry from his palace and by forbidding his son to go to war. Inevitably, however, Atys is killed: a spear cast by Croesus' guest-friend Adrastus at a wild boar hits Atys instead, and Adrastus commits suicide in remorse. Fate is triumphant. A different tale is recorded by Pausanias (ca. 150 A. D.) when describing Dyme in Achaia;[54] he attributes its origin to the poet Hermesianax (ca. 340 B. C.). In this version Attis is a Phrygian, described as "οὐ τεκνοποιος ὑπο τῆς μητρὸς τεχθειη", unable to conceive children even from the time of his birth[55], or, as W.H.S. Jones translates the phrase, "a eunuch from birth".[56] It would seem that Pausanias is referring to a case of abnormal sexual development rather than the inability to impregnate women sucessfully. The tenor of the story is not, however, pejorative toward Attis: he becomes a priest of the Great

Mother Goddess, and establishes her worship throughout Lydia. He is eventually killed by a wild boar sent by a jealous Zeus. It is possible that the emphasis on Attis' atypical sexuality may simply be an aetiological tale to account for the tradition of eunuch priests in the service ot the Goddess in Asia Minor; the name Attis, in fact, appears to have been the title of upper-rank priests of the Great Mother. There exists, for example, a record of correspondence between Attalus II of Pergamon (reigned 159-138 B. C.) and a chief priest of Pessinus named Attis.[57] Sir J.G. Frazer points out that the name Attis seems to mean "father",[58] an appropriate title for a high-ranking ecclesiastic. Yet whether the legend or the name/title came first remains a conundrum.

Pausanias also gives a more convoluted and sensationalistic local variant of the Attis tale. It is, however, unclear to what period in time this version dates. In brief, Zeus spills some semen on the earth; a double-sexed being, Agdistis, comes into being from the ejaculation. The gods come to fear the creature: s/he is beyond the norm of nature and can reproduce her/himself at will. Hence the gods castrate Agdistis; an almond tree springs from the severed genitalia. The daughter of the river Sangarios plucks an almond, becomes pregnant as a result, and eventually gives birth to Attis. The child is exposed, but a he-goat (τράγος) suckles the infant, who grows up to be a handsome shepherd.

The final baroque twist in the story comes when Agdistis

reappears on the scene; Attis, who is about to be married, goes mad at the sight of the creature, castrates himself, and dies. It is evident that the Attis legend has undergone a remarkable change; issues of gender which do not arise in Herodotus' version, and are but hinted at in Hermesianax, have now become the main focus of the tale. Yet a different naturalistic version of the tale, a love story which clearly links Attis and Cybele, is given by Diodorus Siculus.[59] Here Cybele is human, not immortal; abandoned in the wild as a young child, she is nourished by panthers, and brought up by shepherdesses. Eventually she marries her beloved shepherd Atys, and mourns him when he dies. Diodorus' mention of the panthers, nontheless, links the tale to one of Cybele's iconographic attributes.

It is interesting to note that Ovid's retelling of the Attis legend in the *Fasti*,[60] which, of course, postdates Catullus' work, comes very close to what is recounted in Pausanias' second version of the tale. Ovid's emphasis, however, is on love and betrayal. The handsome boy Attis (facie spectabilis, 223) has sworn to serve the Idaean Mother, the Cybelean, as Ovid calls her,[61] in a "chaste love" (casto amore, 224). The Goddess commands that he "be a boy forever" (semper fac esse puer velis, 226); this phrase seems to be a coy circumlocution on Ovid's part for avoiding sexual contact with women. Alas, the demon of sex rears its ugly head: Attis falls in love with a tree-nymph, Sangaritis. The Goddess is

angered and causes the death of the nymph; Attis goes mad and raves in measures suggestive of the more bombastic arias of nineteenth-century romantic opera.[62] He dies in dramatic style after severing his genitalia. The light touch with which Ovid tells his tale, tongue in cheek, is far indeed from Catullus' disturbing work; Ovid's conventional treatment of the story as a love-triangle serves, however, to throw into relief the multi-layered, dark and complex *carmen* 63.

Other literary evidence pertaining to the Attis-figure before the time of Catullus is scant and vague. In his encyclopedic commentary on Catullus, Robinson Ellis traces the references to Attis in Greek sources,[63] but most of these are too fragmentary to give any clues to what the Attis figure represents. A phrase from Theopompus (b. 396 B. C.), quoted in the Suda (I, 370) gives evidence for Attis' Phrygian origins: Ἄττις παρὰ Φρυξὶ μάλιστα τιμᾶται ὡς πρόσπολος τῆς μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν (Attis is especially honored among the Phrygians as the attendant [or, ministering priest: the word carries both connotations] of the Mother of the Gods). The word προσπολος, then, lends ambiguity to Theopompus' phrase: by Attis he may mean the title or name of a priest of the Great Mother; or he may be a mythical figure whose function is to be the personal servitor of the Goddess. If we take the latter meaning, it is possible to say that Catullus' treatment of Attis has at least one source in literary tradition; yet, if this is so, the source is given a unique twist, through

gender-bending and eventually turning Attis into the female handmaid of the Goddess.

How the religious veneration of Attis developed also remains obscure, not only because of the scarcity of written evidence, but also because in the earliest extant visual representations his figure is difficult to identify, and consequently to trace over the course of time. Unlike the Great Mother, he has no clearly defined visual attributes until approximately the first century A. D, that is, after the death of Catullus.

The earliest extant representations which are identified as Attis (3rd.-2nd. c. B. C.) show an attractive youth in a peaked Phrygian cap.[64] This single attribute, however, can be misleading unless supported by further epigraphic or other evidence. Other mythological figures connected with Asia Minor are also normally portrayed wearing this characteristic headdress, notably Paris, Adonis, Orpheus, or Amazons. It must be noted that there is no implication of effeminacy or ambiguous gender identity in any of the early representations of Attis, a characteristic which, for a while, will become his primary identifying feature shortly after the lifetime of Catullus.

It is equally difficult to determine when and how the Attis figure came to be closely associated with the Mother Goddess, and it is unclear what function he originally served in her cult. It is possible, as F. Cumont theorizes, that the

initial connection of the two figures has its origins in nature-worship[65]: Cybele is a deity closely connected with nature in the wild, while Attis may represent a vegetation god. One of the earliest representations thought to show Attis in the company of the Goddess is a relief found at Piraeus, dated to about 300 B. C.; its provenance is unknown.[66] Its execution is clumsy, and the relief has unfortunately suffered considerable damage. A seated male figure wearing a Phrygian cap, called Attis by Vermasaren, stretches his arm toward an unidentifiable object in the hand of a standing female figure. Her identity, however, seems unclear. Vermaseren calls her Agdistis (presumably on epigraphic evidence, which he does not cite), and identifies her with Cybele.[67] This female figure wears a high *polos* and carries a *tympanum*, but no feline beast is present on the relief. The identification of the two figures thus seems ambiguous; it is possible that this relief represents a different myth. It is, however, worth noting that the two figures are of equal size; this implies that they have equal status, whether divine or mortal.

A far more attractive relief, of sophisticated workmanship and well-preserved,[68] is dated by M.J. Vermaseren to the third or second century B. C. While its provenance is also unknown, it is, if not Greek, evidently influenced by Greek workmanship and style. The Goddess can be identified by her *polos*, *tympanum*, and the presence of the lion depicted at

her side. The male figure shown on the relief, presumably Attis, wears a Phrygian cap, tunic, cape and leggings, and leans on what looks like a rough-hewn staff. The two figures, standing side by side, are being approached by two much smaller female figures, possibly mother and daughter or mistress and maid, since one is larger than the other.

Since the Goddess and Attis are represented as equal in height, as well as much larger than the other two figures, the depiction implies that they share equally in a divine nature; possibly Attis is shown as the consort of the Goddess. No suggestion of atypical masculinity is made in his depiction. Both the Goddess and Attis are majestic in appearance, and the lion at their side is regal rather than grotesque or frightening; the relief conveys an impression of serenity and calm. Although we do not know the context in which the relief was originally displayed, its appearance does not suggest a connection with orgiastic religious rites.

However the cult of Attis may have developed in Asia Minor or in other areas around the Mediterranean, and whatever links it may have formed with the cult of the Mother Goddess/Cybele, there is no clear evidence that the Attis figure was associated with the state cult of Magna Mater in Rome during the period of the Republic. There is, furthermore, no indication that Attis was known to the Roman public at large. It is revealing that Lucretius, in the passage quoted above, makes no mention of Attis; nor is there

any other reference to him in surviving Roman writing until Catullus' *carmen* 63; this the first time the name Attis is mentioned in Roman texts.[69] Whatever the source of the poet's inspiration for the poem was, it is likely to have come initially from outside Rome, whether it was, as it has been suggested, Hellenistic writings,[70] or religious practices seen during the poet's stay in Bithynia as part of the Pro-Consul Memmius' retinue.[71]

An extended footnote, however, must be appended to the preceding paragraph. P. Romanelli's excavations (1952) of the Temple of Magna Mater on the Palatine brought to light a large quantity of of small terra cotta objects, seemingly votive images, which Romanelli dates to the last twenty or twenty-five years of the first century B. C. A number of them represent parts of the human body (hands, knees, feet, etc.); these seem to be images given to the deity in the hope of her aid in curing the limbs represented, or, alternatively, thank-offerings for successful intervention on the part of the Goddess.[72] There is also a large group representing the male genitalia; while these may simply be fertility symbols, they could conceivably be images of the genitalia dedicated to the Goddess by her eunuch priests.[73] The most interesting images, however, from our point of view, represent what seem to be male figures in Phrygian dress, resembling the clothing of Attis in the Piraeus relief. They are, however, a far cry from that attractive image: primitive and executed with little

skill, they appear clumsy if not grotesque. Some have coarse and puffy features; it is difficult to state with certainty if they represent children or adults, and their masculinity is ambiguous. Some of the figures are linked with the pastoral tradition; they are shown playing pan-pipes or riding on the back of a ram.[74] If these are representations of Attis, then it appears that worship of Attis was by this time linked to the rites of Magna Mater in the Palatine temple during the later years of the Roman Republic.

The presence of these votive figures does not, however, contradict the negative evidence concerning the existence of Attis-worship in the state cult of Magna Mater. It does suggest that Attis was known to the foreign priests, and possibly venerated in private together with the Magna Mater. Since it appears that the Phrygian temple priests led a self-contained existence, except during the annual festival of the Megalensia, most Roman citizens probably had little or no awareness of the private rites and practices of the priests. Nonetheless, while Attis-worship is likely to have been confined to the community of foreign priests, the existence of the Palatine terra cottas raises the possibility that then cult of Attis may have been practiced by a wider group of initiates. Could Catullus have known of this; could his disturbing poem 63 have been inspired by such a source close at hand? Yet if this was so, he transmuted his knowledge of a religious rite into something new and strange, creating a

unique work of literary art.

Catullus' Recasting of the Cybele/Attis Legend.

This highly complex and multi-layered poem can be approached from many points of view. One is to read it as a short avant-garde closet drama, a miniaturization and modernization of a classical Greek tragedy, set to raucous oriental music. Its setting is in the wild mountain landscape of Phrygia, with a flashback to urban Greece, possibly Athens: a play within a play. There are two lead actors (rather than the conventional three of classical Greek tragedy), who represent Attis and Cybele; the two protagonists could, however, be played by a single actor, since the two never actually meet on stage. There is a chorus of Attis' companions, who have no speaking parts; two of these actors could mime the part of Cybele's lions at the end of the mini-drama.

The structure of the poem is simple, consisting of three descriptive scenes, interspersed with speeches by Attis and Cybele. These speeches could be termed arias, since Greek drama appears to have been more akin to opera than to theatre in the modern sense of the term. The first scene shows the arrival of Attis and his companions in Phrygia at night (1-11), and is followed by Attis' first speech/aria (12-26). The second describes the rush of Attis and his troop to Cybele's

mountain sanctuary (27-38) and the coming of morning (27-49), followed by Attis' second (and last) speech/aria (50-73). The third introduces Cybele and her lions; (74-90).; the third, and last, speech/aria, is spoken/sung by Cybele (78-83). The poem concludes with a brief coda in the form of a prayer to the Goddess (91-93), which parallels the conventional brief commentary made at the end of a Greek drama by the chorus.

The simplicity of the poem's structure is in dramatic tension with the meter in which it is written, the highly unusual galliambic. That the galliambic is a difficult and unnatural metre is attested to by the fact that there are hardly any examples of its use in the ancient world, either in Greek or in Latin;[75] that Catullus could write a long poem in this meter is truly a virtuoso performance.[76] This meter undoubtedly contributes to the suggestion of speed and frenzy conveyed by parts of the poem, and when read aloud, the lines have a curiously irregular, stumbling effect. To use a modern parallel, it is as if one were trying to waltz, not to three-quarter time, but rather to a time of seven-eights: one's foot trips and stumbles over the unexpected extra beat.[77] It is possible that Catullus chose to use the galliambic, rather than a more conventional metre, to underscore the physical and mental state of his protagonist Attis--the rapid, yet awkward and hesitant vagaries of a man in the throes of madness.

The poem, on one level, deals with something beyond the pale of what is considered to be normal. The subject matter

of *carmen* 63, the self-inflicted castration of a young male has shock value for any reader, regardless of gender. It is the act of a man "goaded by raging madness, wandering in his mind" (stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, uagus animis, 4). It is, no doubt, significant that the short coda/prayer which ends the poem is a direct plea to the Goddess, an apotropaeic incantation to ward off such madness from the narrator of the poem, whose voice the reader has not heard up to this time:

> procul a mea tuos sit furor omnis, era, domo:
> alios age incitatos, alios age rabidos. (92-93)
>
> Mistress, may all your madness stay far from my dwelling:
> Drive others mad, drive others crazy.

But to say that *carmen* 63 is meant to be a realistic portrayal of a man driven to unnatural behavior by religious fervor is a reduction of the work. Clearly this poem is not set in the realm of the real, but rather in that of the fantastic: the poem creates a surreal nightmare vision. [78]

The rapid movement of the narrative suggests a speeded-up sequence in a motion picture. Attis' sea voyage from what seems to be Greece to the mountains of Phrygia, which, in the realm of reality, must have spanned a number of days, is telescoped into a single line of verse: "Super alta vectus Attis celeri rate maria" (Attis, caried over the deep seas in a swift craft, 4). Time is thus dislocated and manipulated by the narrator of the poem. And when the reader has barely begun to enter into the long narrative of ninety-three lines, Attis has already disembarked on the Phrygian shore; by line

five he has committed the irrevocable and shocking act of self-castration which is the center of the poem: "devolsit ibi acuto sibi pondera silice" (there he cut off his balls [lit., weights: perhaps a touch of black humor here) with a sharp flint).[79] The reader has been caught off guard; he can scarcely believe that he has processed the words correctly. The climax of the poem, moreover, has been dislocated from its conventional position near the end of a narrative to its beginning. The speed of the action continues at the same break-neck pace for the next thirty-three lines, as Attis and the *thiasos* of his emasculated followers rush through the dark mountain landscape to the sanctuary of Cybele (5-38). Time, then, is manipulated and dislocated at the narator's fancy, just as the mind manipulates and dislocates real time in dreams.

The reader's sense of being caught in a nightmare is reinforced by the night-time setting of the first part of the poem (1-38). The action takes place in a murky darkness; the word *opaca* (opaque, dark, murky) recurs twice in these lines, (opaca silvis redimita loca deae, the murky haunts of the Goddess surrounded by woods, 3; opaca nemora, the murky groves, 32). The repetition of this word suggests that the narrator is trying to convey the almost tactile quality of an ominous darkness. The only spot of color in the setting is the blood which Attis spatters on the ground as he castrates himself (recente terrae sola sanguine maculans, spattering the

earth's floor with freshly-shed blood, 7). Attis' shocking act of extremism, the pivot on which the narrative turns, has, paradoxically, an equally unreal quality: the poem conveys no sense of the extreme physical pain that the excision of the male genitalia with a flint must cause. While it may be argued that a self-induced state of religious ecstasy may lead one to feel nothing during the act itself, the operation must eventually cause great physical trauma. Yet there is no indication of this in the text; the only pain which is conveyed in the poem is the great mental anguish which Attis feels when he comes to a full realization of what he has done. The act of self-castration seems, rather, to be part of a dream, a momentary visual flash in the dislocated consciousness of a nightmare.

The quality of eerie unreality is also reinforced by the narrator's juxtaposition of sharply exact descriptions with shadowy shapes and contours. The reader is given a vivid aural depiction of the group of newly-emasculated youths rushing like a Bacchic *thiasos*, ululating and panting (simul anhelans amimam agens, 31), to the accompaniment of rattles, drums and pipes (21-32). Yet the landscape through which the *thiasos* passes is extremely vague; it is even unclear whether the sanctuary of Cybele which Attis seeks actually exists, or whether he and his followers fall asleep exhausted in a clearing in the *opaca nemora*.

As in a dream, shapes shift, and beings are transformed

in the twinkling of an eye. Within three lines, the male protagonist is changed into a strange kind of female from a castrated male. In line four, Attis is characterized by adjectives in the masculine gender as *stimulatus* and *vagus*, aroused (by madness) and wandering (in his mind); by line six he is described as having the feminine attribute of snow-white hands (*niveis manibus*). His followers are transmogrified with equal despatch; by line twelve they have become Gallae, not Galli. The femininity of the group is underscored by the diminutive adjective *lassulae*--not, one suspects, without a touch of black humor on the part of the poet. Its effect is condescending: "the worn-out little ladies."

Disquieting animal images flit through the nightmare vision. In line thirteen, the Gallae are addressed by Attis as "the wandering flocks of the Dindymean Mother" (Dindymenae dominae vaga pecora). The noun *pecora* normally refers to herds of small domesticated animals, sheep or goats; one doubts that these fall under the protection of a Goddess associated with nature in the wild. It is more likely that they merely serve as prey for the sacred lions of the Goddess, and are helpless among all the wild beasts for whom the mountain landscape is their natural habitat, "the deer who cherishes the woods, the boar who wanders through the groves" (cerva silvicultrix, aper nemorivagus, 72). In line 33, Attis, too, is likened to an animal, significantly of the female sex: an "untamed heifer shunning the burden of a yoke"

(veluti iuuenca uitans onus indomita iugi). This comparison sounds an ominous note; the heifer was one of the most favored sacrificial animals in the ancient world. Attis, of course, eventually becomes a kind of living sacrifice to Cybele. It is also ironic that Attis has been rushing to take on, not to avoid, the yoke of the Dindymean Goddess.

In contrast to the murky night landscape of the first thirty-eight lines, the rest of the poem is set in the daylight. With the advent of morning, the frenzied speed of the action seems to slow down. The strangely juxtaposed scenes suggested by the next ten lines, however, continue to convey to the reader the feeling of unreality created in the night scene; the nightmare is not over. Ellis Robinson characterizes Catullus' description of sunrise after Attis' night of frenzy as " a beautiful description of day-break, a passage unusually modern in its colouring and its association of revivified nature with restored reason."[80] It is true that the first image of the personified rising Sun is lovely, if conventional: he is shown with golden countenance and radiant eyes, purifying the earth and driving away the shades of night with his lively steeds (oris aurei Sol radiantibus oculis lustravit...pepulitque umbras noctis uegetis sonipedibus, 39-41).

But with six well-chosen words in line 40, Catullus manages to transform the morning scene into a into a bleak, forbidding and desolate landscape: aethera album, sola dura,

mare ferum (white sky, harsh earth, wild sea). The use of the adjective *album* to descibe the quality of the air or atmosphere is significant, not only because of its alliterative value. The word is defined as being the opposite of *ater*, "dead black, without lustre;"[81] hence it is likely to suggest dead white; or, in other terms, a flat, matte white. To describe a glowing or shining whiteness, the adjective *candidum*, the opposite of *niger*, a shining black,[82]is normally used. There are numerous examples in Catullus' poetry which evidently convey this shade of meaning: candidi soles,[83] candida puella,[84] candidos dentes,[85] candido pede.[86] The word *album*, then, used in conjunction with the adjectives harsh and wild, suggests a forbidding, rather than lovely, landscape, in keeping with the nightmare quality of the poem. The word *lustravit* (purified, 40), moreover, seems to imply that the landscape has been defiled and needs cleansing after the frenzy of the preceding night.

This glimpse of bleak morning is juxtaposed with the unexpected image of Somnus, Sleep personified, fleeing into the arms of his trembling spouse Pasithea (44-47), an obscure mythological figure.[87] The reader cannot help wondering whether Catullus is teasing the reader with learned myth identification. Furthermore, one wonders why this divinity is described by the adjective *trepidante*; is the author suggesting an ominous foreboding for Attis' forthcoming awakening, or is he making a reference to some obscure text of

which the knowledgable reader should be aware? Could the author be playing an elaborate game with his reader?

The scene shifts back rapidly to the world of Attis in line 43 as he awakens to the awareness of the irrevocable act which has taken place in the course of the night. He is overcome by mental shock; with "seething mind" (animo aestuante, 46) he notices his physical feminization: "vidit sine quis et ubique foret" (s/he saw what s/he lacked and where s/he was, 45). Still the poem continues to elide the experience of physical pain of the part of Attis; the reader remains in a purely visual nightmare, perhaps somewhere in the mind of Attis.

The dream vision then shifts to a flashback as Attis describes his former life in a Greek urban setting, lamenting that which he has lost forever as he looks over the sea towards his fatherland, which he cannot see (50-73). Superficially, the purpose of this scene may be to establish a contrast between the enlightened and sophisticated male-oriented civilization of a Greek city, and the wild natural realm ruled by an Asiatic female deity, as some scholars have suggested.[88] Yet one needs to examine more closely the picture that Attis paints; it must be remembered this is Attis' own account of his past life, and, as such, may betray some distortion and wishful thinking about a past that may never have existed. He casts himself at the center of a privileged élite male society: "Ego gymnasii fui flos, ego

eram decus olei (64). Lovers sleep on his threshold and garland his doors with flowers (65-66). It is evident that Attis sees himself as the center of a homosexual, not heterosexual, society.[89] He plays the role of the adored one, courted by a multitude of male suitors: the passive role: the conventional role of the female in heterosexual relationships:

> mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida
> mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat,
> linquendum ubi esset orto mihi sole cubiculum (65-67).
>
> My door was busy, my threshold warm;
> my home was garlanded with blooming wreaths
> whenever I had to leave my bedchamber at sunrise.

According to the distorting logic of a dream, one's mind might well take the mental step from being the female partner, the *pathicus*, in a homoerotic relationship to envisioning oneself as the member of the female sex. The reader may also question whether Attis was truly the hub of an élite homosexual society, or whether he is merely investing the lost past with a glamour it never possessed. Is the author suggesting self-delusion in the "reality" of the nightmare, a reality which only exists in the fiction of the poem? The game becomes more and more complex; the author seems to drawing the reader deeper and deeper into a series of concentric circles of illusion.

If the author is seen as playing elaborate games with his text, the reader may also question how seriously Attis' lament on the seashore (50-73) is to be taken; K. Quinn, for example,

considers the speech "almost a pastiche of tragic style."[90] Moreover, the seashore scene in *carmen* 63 shows a striking similarity to the extended *ekphrasis* in *carmen* 64 (50-265), which describes Ariadne newly abandoned by Theseus. Both scenes picture women lamenting their respective losses in a sea-shore setting, both are in the throes of intense emotion. One may justifiably call Attis a woman at this point, since his gender has already been altered by a stroke of the author's stylus. It is likely that in both poems Catullus was drawing upon a stock scene from Roman comedy; Ariadne's lament in *carmen* 64 shows strong verbal echoes of the shipwrecked prostitute Palaestra's speech in Plautus' *Rudens*.[91] Thus, if Ariadne's lament is more closely connected to the realm of comedy than to that of tragedy, Attis' lament, too, can be read from this point of view. Seen from this angle, the figure of Attis, already ambiguous, is diminished yet further by the author. Far from being a tragic figure caught in the web of destiny, s/he is merely pathetic. S/he is, after all, the cause of her/his own misfortune, and it is too late to complain about the self-inflicted physical alteration.

The two lines of verse directly following Attis' lament (74-75) give the reader a further clue to the author's attitude toward his protagonist. In line 74, the hybrid creature Attis is described as having rosy lips (roseis...labellis), a touch of grotesque humor implying that s/he has become conventionally pretty. The next ponderous

line, however, seems to belong to the realm of epic: geminas deorum ad aures nova nuntia referens (bringing back these strange news to the twinned ears of the gods, 75). This line is oddly incongruous within its context. The gods, who have no bearing on the action whatsoever, seem to have appeared from nowhere for no identifiable purpose; furthermore, why do they have "twinned ears?" Once again the reader is led to suspect that the author may be playing a game with the reader, switching from one literary mode to another at will. The effect is grotesque; the epic may actually be mock-epic.

Attis appears briefly for one last time in line 88, where s/he is described as *tener* (slight, delicate), an adjective that underscores the *roseis labellis* of line 74. His/her final appearance as a delicate creature (who is now what?) with rosy lips, being chased by Cybele's lion into the woods, is pathetic if not grotesque. The rest of the poem (76-93), however, belongs wholly to Cybele, who, in this nightmare vision, is a transmogrification of the venerable Great Mother as depicted by Lucretius in the passage from the *De Rerum Natura* quoted earlier in this chapter. If Lucretius' Great Goddess represents a benign force which nurtures all life upon earth, as well as human civilization, Catullus' Goddess is a cruel *domina* who negates this force. The divine Mistress of Nature is reduced to a vindictive and cruel creature. The key adjective describing Cybele is *minax* (84): threatening or looming. As she sends forth one of her lions to terrify and

recapture her recalcitrant new votary, she goads it on (*stimulans*, 77), ordering the beast to lash his own back: age caede terga cauda, tua verbere patere (Go on, strike your back with your tail, endure your own lashes, 81). The verb *caedere* has not only the primary meaning of "to lash" or "to strike"; it also has the secondary meaning of "to cut": Cybele is hardly a kind mistress to her sacred beasts.

The reference in line 77 to the left-hand lion raises an interesting issue (laevumque pecoris hostem stimulans ita loquitur; and goading on the left-hand enemy of flocks, she speaks thus). According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Cybele's pair of lions are a male and a female, the transformed lovers Atalanta and Hippomenes.[92] Ovid's work, of course, postdates that of Catullus; but it is possible that Ovid derives his story from an earlier legend of which Catullus, too, may have been aware. There appears, however, to be no extant story that indicates which lion is yoked on the left, and which on the right of Cybele's cart. If one assumes that the left-hand lion is the female, given the supposed dominance of the male sex and the sinister connotations of the left side in Roman culture, Catullus' Cybele is a mistress who not only unmans and alters males, but takes pleasure in domineering a member of her own sex: she then is a cruel mistress to both genders. This, however, is not what Catullus' poem emphasizes.

Nor is there any indication that Cybele has any affection or compassion for her new votary. The relationship between

them is based purely on power. The Goddess could release the helpless and pathetic figure that Attis has now become; she chooses, rather, to frighten her/him into permanent submission as her life-long servant--or slave. In the last lines of the narrative (85-90), the lion rushing through the undergrowth seems to become an extension of the cruel Goddess herself, and an embodiment of her savagery.

The flat statement at the end of the narrative summarizes the reduction of Attis' entire life within a few words: ibi semper omne viatae spatium famula fuit (there she remained forever, for all her lifetime, a handmaid, 90). The reader now finds himself at the end of the nightmare vision; it has passed. The narrator's apotropaeic brief prayer, directly addressed to Cybele, and spoken in his own voice, which is now heard for the first and last time, is a fitting and logical conclusion to the poem:

> dea, magna dea, Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi,
> procul a mea tuos sit furor omnis, era, domo:
> alios age incitatos, alios age rabidos. (91-93)
>
> Goddess, great Goddess, Cybele, Goddess,
> mistress of Dindymus;
> Mistress, may all your wrath stay far from my household:
> Drive others mad, drive others crazy.[93]

Beyond its flashes of black humor, then, the nightmare vision is bleak and pessimistic. There is no evidence in the poem that Cybele and Attis, Goddess and mortal, ever connect with each other in any way other than as mistress and slave. There is no indication that Cybele has blessed or favored her new votary during his night of frenzied ecstasy; the mortal

the divine, he is bound to fail. There is an unbridgeable gap between the mortal and the divine; man can never go beyond his limited sphere.[94] Furthermore, the divinity that Attis seeks may be non-existent, a product of his own illusions. For the modern reader with conceptions of divinity formed by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Catullus' Cybele has nothing of the divine about her. In exchange for Attis' sacrifice of manhood, she grants her new votary nothing: no mercy, no joy, no love. If Lucretius envisioned his gods as remote and indifferent to human affairs, Catullus here portrays divinity as merciless if not positively malignant--not unlike William Blake's Nobodaddy.[95]

The Meaning and Internal Sources of the Attis Poem.

One must, however, also note that the relationship between Cybele and Attis is not only one betwen mortal and immortal, but also between male and female. If *carmen* 63 is read as an *exemplum* of relationships between men and women, a disturbing picture emerges: Attis is a male who submits himself entirely to his mistress, and unmans himself in the process. The point that here woman is the all-powerful and dominant member of the male-female dyad need not be belabored; the male lover is, literally as well as figuratively, impotent. But it must be emphasized that it is not the female who is the cause of the male's impotence. While she reveals

impotent. But it must be emphasized that it is not the female who is the cause of the male's impotence. While she reveals herself to be a cold, power-hungry and harsh *domina*, it is the male lover who willfully desexes himself; he is the agent of his own sexual downfall. Laboring under self-created illusion, he makes a self-destructive choice about his own sexual destiny.

The consequences of Attis' wrong choice are, of course, unfortunate: s/he can look homeward, but can never return. One one level, the reader can respond to the universal human nostalgia for a past which has been irrevocably lost, and can feel that Attis has suffered a sad fate, as well as a very cruel punishment. Yet, on another level, the reader cannot entirely abandon one's sense of the ridiculous. There is undeniably a grotesque aspect to Attis being chased into the woods by a lion. Is s/he now dressed in the clothes of a woman? Does s/he now have breasts? The effect of the poem on the reader at its ending is decidedly ambiguous.

Should the Attis poem be read as an imaginative exploration of its author's troubled sexuality? Does it express, albeit in veiled terms, his feeling of impotence in his relationships with women, or with a particular powerful and domineering woman? Is the Cybele of *carmen* 63 a transmogrification of the Lesbia-*domina* figure who repeatedly appears in Catullus' short poems? Is Cybele another mask for the notorious Clodia Metelli, who, according to the

traditional view among scholars of Roman literature, actually was the Lesbia with whom Catullus had a frustrating liaison;[96] is Attis a mask for the poet himself, rendered powerless, and in thrall to Clodia?. In other words, is the poem a veiled confession of personal experience in metaphorical terms?

It seems undeniable that the Attis poem had its sources in the lived or the psychic reality of the poet Catullus. It is known that he travelled to Bithynia as a member of the *cohors* of the *Pro-Consul* C. Memmius, the aristocrat to whom Lucretius addressed the *De Rerum Natura*. It is possible that the setting of the poem is the artistic transformation of an actual seen landscape in the vicinity of Mt.Ida. While there is no evidence that Catullus visited mainland Greece, it is hardly surprising that a *doctus poeta* should be able to create a vivid evocation of the aristocratic homoerotic milieu, seemingly Athenian, which Attis abandoned to serve Cybele. Furthermore, while whatever impulse drove the poet to write *carmen* 63 cannot be known, the power of the poem to unnerve the reader suggests the existence of a strong emotional impetus as the basis of its creation. It is also possible that the poet witnessed disturbing practices in the course of his travels, or simply found Cybele's eunuch priests in Rome both repellent and fascinating. It is even possible that he created Cybele with a particular woman, his Lesbia-figure or someone else, in mind.

But a poem is not autobiography but fiction, an artificial creation; even a poem written with the most serious intent is, in a sense, an intellectual game, a *ludus*, despite the fact that it is tempting for the reader to see in a poem, ancient or modern, the direct reflection of its creator's emotional reality. In order to apprehend the complex relationship that exists between a poem and its creator, it is useful to go through a simple exercise suggested by Paul Veyne in his provocative work on Roman love poetry, *L'Élégie Erotique Romaine*.[97]

The reader is invited by Veyne to express any strongly-felt emotion or mental state on paper, provided that it is cast in any traditional poetic form which is strictly conventional: sonnet, elegy, song....Anyone who attempts this will find that the original emotion becomes transmuted by the constraints imposed by the form that has been chosen. What finally emerges--more or less successful, depending on one's literary talent and skill--is something quite different from the emotion as originally felt: precisely, a new creation.[98] As Paul Veyne puts it, the writer has "erected in homage (to the emotion) a very decorative monument. He now has a new calling: architect." ("...il lui a élevé en hommage un monument très décoratif. Il a maintenant un nouveau métier: architecte.)[99] Veyne's metaphor is clever in itself; it also makes the point that a poet literally constructs something new with the words that he writes.

It is thus important to emphasize the artificial aspect of the Attis poem, the term "artificial" being used in its primitive and literal meaning, "made with art/skill". The carefully controlled and tight structure of the poem, as well as Catullus' use of the difficult and unnatural galliambic metre indicate in themselves the high degree of artifice required in the "building" of *carmen* 63, to use Paul Veyne's metaphor once more. There is, furthermore, internal evidence from within the *corpus* of Catullus' poetry to indicate that the poet was well aware of himself as an artificer with words. In *carmen* 50, addressed to a friend and fellow poet, Calvus,[100] he writes:

> Hesterno, Licini, die otiosi
> multum lusimus in meis tabellis
> ut convenerat esse delicatos,
> scribens versiculos uterque nostrum
> ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc. (1-5)
>
> Yesterday, Licinus, on a leisurely day,
> we played at length with our writing-tablets,
> as it had been agreed by us sophisticates--
> scribbling little verses,
> each one of us played,
> now with this measure, now with that.

The picture of the two friends at leisure, enjoying themselves by dashing off verses is charming; but it also reveals a poet conscious of the ludic quality of writing poetry, of the intellectual play with words: the verb *ludo*, to play, is used twice within five lines in this short poem.

Carmen 35, addressed to another poet-friend, Caecilius,[101] is also suggestive. It is a cleverly-turned invitation to visit Catullus in Verona, despite his

girfriend's protests. The poem ends with the following statement: "...est enim venuste/Magna Caecilio incohata Mater" (17-18, for the Magna Mater begun by Caecilius is charming). Possibly the Attis poem is a reply to Caecilius' work in progress, a reworking of the same subject from a different angle: another *ludus* played between two poets.

What the point of such an intellectual *ludus* may have been, if it existed, is lost to posterity. It seems, however, that Catullus, on his part, is playing with the idea of gender. Since there are elements of black humor in the depiction of Attis, it is hard even to know how seriously one is to take the poem as a whole. But the word-game which makes a lightning shift of Attis from male to female seems to imply that a man is defined as such solely by his male organ, not by the combination of the attributes apparently valued by the upper-class Roman--*virtus, fides, pietas*--or by his individual character. It is the prick that counts, not the man. Whether playful or not, the poet's suggestion that manhood, as traditionally defined, may be an illusion, is subversive.

The Influence of the Attis Poem.

Yet to say that *carmen* 63 is only a ludic performance, only an artist's play with novel techniques and unusual subject-matter, would be a reduction of the poem: it is too complex and raises too many questions. That Catullus was

consciously shaping a multi-layered and innovative, well-wrought work of art is perhaps a more exact statement. Yet while its present-day reader, heir to psychoanalytic and post-modern theory,[102] can appreciate Catullus' artistic achievement in the Attis poem, one is led to wonder what effect it had on its contemporary audience.[103] The fact that it occupies a solitary position in the history of Roman poetry leads one to believe that it was not understood, possibly not appreciated, by the Roman reading public. There are no extant imitations of the Attis poem; although Ovid re-tells the Attis legend in the *Fasti*,[104] his romanticized version is, in comparison to Catullus' powerful narrative, insipid and conventional.

Yet it could be argued that *carmen* 63 had some influence, however slight, on subsequent Roman literary production. The streak of subtle black humor which one glimpses at times in the Attis poem becomes pronounced in the work of Ovid, particularly the *Metamorphoses*.[105] Florence Verducci sees it as well in the *Heroides*, notably in the treatment of the abandoned Ariadne.[106] It is also possible that some passages of dubious taste in Seneca's tragedies, thought to be unconsciously comic, may, in fact, be deliberate examples of the same brand of black humor, incongruous and unexpected in a serious work. The most infamous of these is, no doubt, the description of the *membra disiecta* of Hippolytus, which his grieving father Theseus treats as a jig-saw puzzle.[107] Even

so, the direct influence of the Attis poem on other Roman writers appears to be minimal.

The Attis Poem and Visual Images.

Interestingly, however, the poem seems to create a curious ripple-effect in the realm of visual art. Excavations of the buildings at Pompeii and Herculaneum have brought to light a number of decorative household objects which depict Attis: elaborately carved table supports, lamps, jug-handles, and statuettes.[108] In contrast to extant pre-Catullan representations, these objects stress the sexual anomaly of Attis. His lack of male genitalia is emphasized, at times by depicting him as spreading apart his tunic and pointing at the pubic area.[109] Another notable phenomenon is the exaggerated feminization of of Attis' body. In some cases he retains some semblance of a male body, but is shown with markedly enlarged breasts.[110] In other representations his body has an ambiguous shape which amalgamates male and female characteristics.[111] The viewer is inevitably led to recall Catullus' Attis, who, in the course of *carmen* 63, becomes a double-gendered creature. It is thus possible that Catullus' treatment of Attis had a direct effect on how this figure was subsequently envisioned. The destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum occurred in 79 A.D.; the Attis objects which have survived, then, were crafted roughly within a century after

the death of the poet, a likely time-frame for the literary art of the Roman élite to filter down to the Campanians who commissioned the decorative objects and to the artisans who shaped them. Thus Catullus' poem may in fact represent the vanguard of a new aesthetic, one that is characterized by a fascination with the grotesque, and specifically with gender ambiguity.

Attis and Cybele after Catullus.

Finally, to indicate what eventually happened to the myth of Attis and Cybele after Catullus, a short postscript to this chapter is in order. The vision of Attis as a double-gendered creature and Cybele as his cruel mistress created by Catullus was not to prevail for long. The Attis-figure, historically a late adjunct to the cult of Cybele, eventually came to supersede the Goddess. By the second century A. D., the Roman festival of the Megalensia, originally instituted to honor the Idaean Mother, had shifted its focus to Attis, who now was perceived as a kind of savior-figure.[112] The festival now featured elaborate rites, apparently not unlike modern-day Christian passion-plays, which celebrated his life and death.[113]

Attis-worship gradually spread throughout the Roman Empire, and reached the height of its popularity in the third century A. D., to judge by the numerous extant epigraphs and

sculptural representations from that period.[114] That the cult had now become highly respectable is indicated by inscriptions from even the furthest reaches of the Empire which list leading citizens, both men and women, who either acted as priests and priestesses in the cult, or dedicated monuments to Attis in their names.[115] Despite his mortal nature, Attis appears to have attained a form of godhood. Although visual representations from the second century A.D. onward emphasize his non-virile and somewhat feminized appearance, Attis is now also invested with beauty, dignity and majesty, as, for example, in a reclining figure from the Attis shrine in Ostia. Here the radiating rays around the head of Attis suggest identification with a sun deity.

The appeal of the cult seems to have lain in the promise of salvation and possibly an afterlife.[116] Its rites came to be characterized by periodic *taurobolia* or *criobolia*, ritual sacrifices of a bull or ram, in which the votaries of Attis were purified by being washed in the blood of the animal;[117] these recall the Christian sacrament of baptism, another purifying ceremony. Attis, though dying himself, appears to have been perceived as a savior-figure; yet his cult in turn was to be superseded in the course of the following centuries by another mystery religion whose central figure, also dying young, offered the hope of salvation and eternal life to its adherents: Christianity.

1. I use the text of *carmen* 63 as it appears in *Catullus. The Poems*, ed. Kenneth Quinn (London, 1973), 2nd. ed.

2. See Ch.1.

3. Arthur Leslie Wheeler in *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley, 1934) simply avoids any mention of *carmen* 63.

4. Kenneth Quinn, ed., *Catullus. The Poems*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1975), p. 282.

5. Phyllis Young Forsyth, *The Poems of Catullus. A Teaching Text*. (Lanham, Md., 1986), p. 35.

6. Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems*, p. 284. The basic line, according to Quinn, is most easily understood as two sequences of eight syllables each.

7. Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis* (London, 1977), p. 9-12.

8. Grant Showerman, *Great Mother of the Gods*, (Chicago, 1969) p. 68.

9. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis* p. 15.

10. Vermaseren, *loc. cit.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

12. *Loc. cit.*

13. See, for example, v. 3, pl. CIII in Maarten J. Vermasaren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque* (Leiden, 1977).

14. See *ibid.*, v. 2, pl. CIII and pls. LXX-LXXI; v. 3, pl. CLVIII.

15. See Bibliography.

16. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 24.

17. *Loc. cit.*

18. Useful maps which trace the centers of Cybele worship in the second and first millenia B.C. have been drawn up by E. Laroche. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 17.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 24

22. Thus, for example, Euripides (480-406) refers to Kybele in *The Bacchae*, 72-82.

23. Sanctuaries of the Goddess dating to the end of the fifth century B. C. have been found at Marseilles and Locri. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 34.

24. See the plates in Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 2.

25. Showerman, p. 27.

26. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 33.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

28. Another sanctuary was unearthed in 1855 by French soldiers stationed at Piraeus during the Crimean War. Unfortunately, only scanty records were kept, and the exact location of this shrine has never been found again. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 35.

29. *Loc. cit.*

30. Showerman, p. 17.

31. See listings in Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 2.

32. Showerman, p. 31.

33. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, pl. 16, and *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 2, pl. CL-509 and CLVI-521.

34. Showerman, p. 27.

35. *Loc. cit.*

36. Showerman, p. 104.

37. Livy XXIX, 1, 6ff.

38. Despite the efforts of archaeologists, the stone has never been found.

39. Livy, XXIX, 14, 11-14.

40. Showerman, p. 35-36.

41. Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago, 1911), p. 53.

42. H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London, 1980), p. 79.

43. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 96.

44. Scullard, p. 81.

45. Valerius Maximus, VII, 7, 6.

46. I have been unable to discover whether the *numen* of the Goddess was still worshipped under the image of the original black stone, or whether a new image, in the Graeco-Roman naturalistic style had been created, possibly incorporating the stone.

47. A number of Terence's plays were performed during the celebrations of the Megalensia during the years 161-166 B. C., among them *Eunuchus, Heauton Timorumenos, Phormio and Hecyra.* See Showerman, p. 35.

48. The plebeian classes, on the other hand gave *mutationes* on the festival of Ceres. See Showerman, p. 37.

49. *Loc. cit.*

50. Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 9.

51. See in particular the powerful passage about the sacrifice of Iphianassa in Book I, 80-101.

52. Lucretius, II, 600-643.

53. Herodotus, I, 35-44.

54. Pausanias, VII, 17, 5.

55. Pausanias, VII, 17, 9.

56. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W.H.S. Jones (London, 1930), v. 3, p. 267.

57. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 98.

58. Sir James George Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* (New York, 1961), p. 281.

59. Diodorus Siculus, III, 58.

60. Ovid, *Fasti*, IV, 221-246.

61. Ovid, *Fasti*, 182; 191.

62. See the mad scene in 233-242.

63. Robinson Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus*, p. 251-252. Interestingly the earliest reference occurs in Aristophanes' *Birds*, 875-877.

64. See, for example, Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 2, pl. CLXXX-616, 617, which show two dancing figures in Phrygian caps, and pl. CLXXXIII-625, a head, also wearing a Phrygian cap. There are no inscriptions on the figures to identify them conclusively as Attis.

65. Franz Cumont. *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago, 1911), p. 50-51.

66. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, pl. 24.

67. G. Sfameni-Gasparro points out that the figure of Agdistis becomes conflated with that of Cybele. See Giulia Sfameni-Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden, 1985), 34-35.

68. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, pl. 57.

69. Showerman, p. 41.

70. See, for example, Forsyth, p. 327.

71. That *carmen* 63 is a translation or re-working of a Hellenistic Greek original is now generally rejected by Catullan scholars.

72. See Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 3, pls. LXXVIII and LXXIX.

73. *Ibid.*, pls. LII and LIII.

74. *Ibid.*, pls. LVI, LVII, and XXXVI-34.

75. Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems*, p. 284.

76. As Kenneth Quinn remarks, "The poem is both an extraordinary *tour-de-force*, brilliantly executed in a metre extremely difficult to handle in Latin, and a remarkable example of compressed narrative technique." Quinn, *Catullus. An Interpretation* (London, 1972), p. 261.

77. I invite the reader to experiment waltzing to the deceptive third movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony to experience the physical sensation that I describe.

78. While J. P. Elder does not go so far as to call *carmen* 63 a nightmare vision, his assessment of the poem comes close to my interpretation. He states, "As I interpret the work, it is the dramatization of a mental state, or, to put it another way, the sympathetic delineation of a mind undergoing a psychological experience of a most powerful sort." Elder, "Catullus' Attis" in *Approaches to Catullus*, ed. Kenneth Quinn, (Cambridge, 1972), p. 395.

79.Robinson Ellis substitutes *devoluit* (dashed to the ground)) for *devolsit* (cut off), perhaps out of a sense of understandable Victorian delicacy (Ellis, p. 259). Phyllis Young Forsyth goes even further, and uses the term *devovit* (dedicated) in her text of the poem (Forsyth, p. 62). To my mind, this reduces the deliberate shock value of line 5.

80. Ellis, p. 260.

81. Charlton D. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary for Schools* (Oxford, 1964), p. 55.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

83. *Carmen* 8, 7.

84. *Carmen* 13, 4; *carmen* 35, 8.

85. *Carmen* 39, 1.

86. *Carmen* 61, 108.

87. Kenneth Quinn points out a reference to Pasithea in the *Iliad*, XIV, 263-269. Hera here promises Pasithea, a Grace, to Hypnos in marriage, if he will put Zeus to sleep. This scene is echoed in Virgil's *Aeneid*, I, 71-75 (Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems*, p. 292).

88. Brian Arkins, *Sexuality in Catullus* (Hildesheim, 1982), p. 154.

89. Ellis reads this passage as "that intense admiration of perfect male form to which Catullus has here given such splendid expression" (Ellis, p. 258). This is a surprising statement in view of the British laws governing homosexuality at the time Ellis' work was first published in Britain, 1867. It is, however, posible that Ellis did not view Attis' fictional milieu as a homosexual circle.

90. Kenneth Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution*, (Melbourne, 1959), p. 65.

91. Plautus, *Rudens*, 185-219.

92. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 681-709.

93. My English translation cannot convey the subtle play on the word "mistress" in these lines.

94. The theme of separation between man and divinity is taken up again by Catullus in *carmen 64*. Here the mortal and the divine guests at Peleus and Thetis' wedding never intermingle; men depart as deities arrive: *quae postquam cupide spectando Thessala pubes/expleata est, sanctis coepit decedere divis* (267-268).

95. William Blake, *To Nobodaddy*: "Why darkness and obscurity/In all thy words and laws?" In William Blake, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 144.

96. See, for example, A.L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley, 1964), p. 91.

97. Paul Veyne, *L'Élegie Érotique Romaine* (Paris, 1983), p. 164-165.

98. I was obliged to perform precisely this exercise by an instructor in English Renaissance poetry, who wished to give his students a practical demonstration of the art involved in creating a sonnet. My attempt to describe unrequited love became a bleak winter landscape representing my frozen soul.

99. Veyne, p. 165.

100. Kenneth Quinn identifies the Licinius of poem 50 as C. Licinius Calvus Macer, the orator and poet. Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems*, p. 235.

101. Caecilius, unlike Calvus, is a shadowy figure, known only through being mentioned here by Catullus.

102. A highly useful entry to critical theory for the neophyte in the field is Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1983).

103. Ovid, *Fasti* IV, 223-224.

104. See, for example, *Metamorphoses* VI, 549-567, the account of the excision of Philomela's tongue by Tereus.

105. See Florence Verducci's argument in Chapter 6, "Ariadne *in Extremis*" in *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* Princeton, 1985).

106. Seneca, *Hippolytus*, 1247-1274.

107. See Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, v. 3, pls. I, VI, XXIV, and XXV.

108. *Ibid.*, pls. XLVII-274 and CVIII-145.

109. *Ibid.*, pls. XXXIV and XXXV.

110. *Ibid.*, pls. XLIII-137 and CXI (the latter, however, may represent a Lar).

111. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, p. 113-125.

112. See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, Ch. 6; also *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, listing of monuments in v. 3 and v. 4.

113. See Sfameni-Gasparro, Ch. 6.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

CHAPTER 3: NULLUS AMOR: PROPERTIUS AND CYNTHIA

> As for my service to classical scholarship, presumably nil, I shall be quite content if I induce a few Latinists to look at the text of Propertius instead of swallowing an official "position" and then finding out what the text-books tell them to look for.
>
> Ezra Pound

The Problems of Propertius' Poetry.

Propertius is an enigma. His work, more than that of any other major Roman poet, is difficult, crabbed, and at times inaccessible--not entirely through his own fault, but rather because of a combination of factors. To a great extent one can blame chance and the ravages of time for this. Unlike poets such as Virgil, whose works have come down to us transmitted from a manuscript of late antiquity (4-5 c. A.D.), or Horace, whose poems were recorded by a Carolingian scribe (9-10 c. A.D.), Propertius suffers in comparison, since the earliest surviving manuscripts of his poetry are very late, dating to ca. 1200 and 1240 A.D.[1] These have suffered so extensively from repeated editing and rewriting by numerous unknown hands that a modern reader may well ask himself whether he is reading the work of the poet Propertius, or something else entirely.

Not only is the authenticity of certain words or entire verses doubtful, as is the case with the work of all the ancient poets; it is even often unclear where divisions

between poems occur. The difficulty in reading Propertius is compounded by the fact that four books of poems have come down to posterity, yet an internal reference in the text implies that a fifth book may have existed.[2] This raises the additional question of whether the lengthy second book is actually a fragmentary conflation of two mutilated books. Indeed, the complex difficulties inherent in the transmision of Propertius' manuscripts have brought it about that much of the most useful scholarly work connected with Propertius concentrates on the emendation of the texts rather than on his poetry as such.[3]

Yet, to a great extent, it is the poet Propertius himself, not only the corrupt manuscripts, who can be blamed for the difficulties connected with reading his work. His great fondness for mythological references, many of them obscure or even incomprehensible for the modern reader, can be a source of frustration for the literary scholar. By modern standards of taste, the mythological apparatus used by Propertius often seems excessive and unwarranted--a mine of riches for the pedant rather than for the student of poetry. Propertius' mode of narration, furthermore, is seldom linear. Frequently his poems consist of short visual vignettes, which require that the reader make his own imaginative, rather than logical, connections between them. Furthermore, the poems are often suggestive rather than explicit. While this in itself should cause no great problems for anyone familiar with

twentieth-century poetic experimentation, the difficulties inherent in Propertius' poetry are compounded by its allusive nature.[4] As J.P. Boucher has pointed out, within the poems there are numerous allusions to other works of poetry and visual art, many of them unknown to posterity. Thus there are resonances in the poems which even the most learned reader is apt to miss. In brief, then, Propertius is an author not easily accessible for his present-day reader,[5] despite the fact that his poetry appears curiously modern at times.

Perceptions of Propertius.

It must be admitted, however, that Propertius is a complex poet, even by those who may feel that the quest to understand his poetry may ultimately not be worth the effort and that he may be overrated as an artist. Indeed, he seems to be a kind of chameleon, as he represents so many disparate things to those who have studied his work; as a result of recent Propertian scholarship, a highly complex and multi-faceted poet has emerged.

Boucher's thorough study of Propertius (1965), which attempts to look at all aspects of the poet's literary art, remains one of the most valuable texts for the student of Propertius. M. Hubbard's introductory book[6] has served to demystify the poet's work and to make it accessible not only to the classicist, but also to the broader audience of

students of literature in general. Among other major studies, that of T. Paphangelis,[7] has concentrated not only on the poet's Hellenistic roots, but also on his aesthetic of love and death. H.P. Stahl, on the other hand, views Propertius' *oeuvre* as one aimed at the subversion of the Augustan regime.[8] T. Benediktson argues that the poet's sensibility is "modern", akin to the experimental poetry of the twentieth century.[9]

However, the most remarkable--and perhaps the most valuable--work pertaining to Propertius, which predates the studies mentioned above, is not a scholarly effort, but rather what might most accurately be called a "creative translation".[10] It is the American poet Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. Pound's recasting of several poems by the Latin poet into a modern contemporary idiom caused a veritable uproar, if not scandal, in academic circles, both in Britain and the United States. Pound was accused of sloppy and inaccurate translation, as well as of the desecration of Propertius' poetry, by the classical establishment.

The point missed by the scholarly pundits, however, was that Pound was not translating Propertius; he was, rather exploring a poetic sensibility that he found compatible with his own. He was paying homage (note the title of his work) to an ancient poet whom he admired.[11] It is, perhaps, Pound's work, more than any single scholarly effort, that has made Propertius accessible to the modern reader; not only to those trained in the Classics, but also to the wider audience

comprised of students of world literature and lovers of poetry. After reading Pound's work, it is possible to see Propertius not merely as a difficult poet to be grappled with and annotated, but rather as a lively, ironic, witty and individual poetic voice. The *Homage* may be more Pound than Propertius; but it serves the purpose of uncovering facets of the Latin poet's work easily missed amidst grappling with his mythological paraphernalia and the textual lacunae.

From whatever angle one chooses to approach the work of Propertius, the figure of Cynthia stands at its centre and is, to a great extent, the *raison d'être* for its existence. She is both the source and the object of the greater part of his artistic production. Propertius' entire work consists of four books of elegies (seemingly written over a period of some fourteen or fifteen years).[12] Book I, the so-called *monobiblos*, is, from its first words onward (Cynthia prima me suis miserum cepit ocellis; Cynthia first captured poor me with her eyes), almost entirely devoted to her figure.[13] She also dominates Books II and III, although by Book III Propertius' focus is changing as he tries his hand at a number of other topics.[14]

By Book IV, however, Propertius has become aware of himself as a *vates*, the new Roman Callimachus, and concentrates on other subjects: a not unnatural evolution for a poet as he matures and experiments with his material. Here Cynthia appears in two poems only, IV-7 and 8. However, these

two poems, to be discussed briefly later in this chapter, are among his greatest achievements.

It is Propertius'--or, more accurately, his male lover/narrator's--attitude towards this female poetic creation that the next part of this chapter will examine. Thereafter, I will regard Propertius' poetic art from a different viewpoint. I will consider the relationship between Propertius' highly visual poetry and contemporary visual art, specifically Campanian wall painting. Because of an accident of nature, the disastrous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D., which buried the towns and villas of the surrounding area, posterity posesses a wealth of artistic evidence which can be linked aesthetically to Propertius' poetic output.

The Figure of Cynthia.

Before examining the attitude of the male lover/narrator towards the Cynthia figure, one must identify whom, or what this figure represents. This study rejects the so-called biographical approach, one which has been practiced with great frequency among students of the Roman elegiac poets.[15] Since the narrator in Roman elegy is always a male *ego* or "I"[16], the tendency among some scholars has been to identify the narrator with the historical elegist, especially when the poet succeeds in conveying a strong impression of sincerity through his verbal art.[17] This tendency is understandable and

natural, since we can know so little about the lives of these poets whose words speak to the modern reader across the centuries. When immersed in their work, one wishes to give them identity; to clothe their exiguous figures with flesh, as it were. This, however, is the field of historical romance rather than of literary analysis.

Because of a remark made by Apuleius about the identities of the women celebrated in Roman elegy,[18] Propertius' Cynthia has been identified as a woman named Hostia; however, it is not clear who this Hostia was. It has been conjectured by some that she was the daughter of a scholarly patrician, Hostius, because Propertius calls her "docta puella;" other scholars have assumed that she was merely a woman of the *meretrix* class.[19] Furthermore, on the basis of remarks made within Propertius' poems, the progress and chronology of the poet's stormy sexual relationship with Hostia has been traced; it is said to have lasted five years, and Propertius is said to have rejected his mistress by the time Book IV of his poems was published; it is claimed that she may in fact have died in the meantime.[20] It has also been assumed that Cynthia/Hostia was a woman older than the poet; there is, however, no internal evidence within the poetry that suggests this.

In recent years, however, the pendulum of critical fashion has swung in the opposite direction. For Maria Wyke,[21] the figure of a real Cynthia is nonexistent and irrelevant; it is the poetry itself that counts, and the name

Cynthia is merely a convenient hook on which to hang it. The woman does not even need to exist; it is the collocation of the words on the page alone that matters. For Wyke, Cynthia is, in effect, a zero, a void.

Thus within the last few decades, Propertian criticism has progressed from the scholarly quest for the historical Cynthia, with whom the poet Propertius is purported to have been obsessed, to Cynthia as a "written woman," to use Wyke's phrase: a literary creation, and hence totally controlled by her author. Interestingly, however, the issue of Cynthia's identity as a literary rather than a historical persona was perceived and analyzed as early as 1928 by the French writer Julien Benda. Benda's perceptions, however, were ignored by the Classical establishment, no doubt because his quirky but insightful *Properce ou les Amants du Tibur*[22] did not claim in any sense to be a scholarly work.

As Benda points out in his preface, he was commissioned by his publisher to write a book on Propertius aimed at a popular audience of non-specialist readers. What emerged was a curious personal pamphlet, in part a scholarly essay which incorporates his translations of a number of Propertius' verses, in part a pure fantasy cast in the form of a dream sequence. Here the disembodied shades of Propertius and Cynthia appear, in turn, to the author, speaking of their doomed and irreconcilable love affair, of their clash of personalities. Finally they are reconciled beyond the grave,

only in the realm of dreams.

But Benda makes it clear that this is no more than a romantic fiction. He argues, well ahead of Propertian critics, that it is only the poet's verbal art that is worth discussing, not the fictive love affair which serves as the basis of Propertius' poetry; it is even irrelevant whether the poetry is sincere or not. Thus Benda predates by decades the viewpoint of the more recent Propertian critics within the field of Classics:

> Je reprenais donc cette oeuvre en la regardant uniquement comme un dispositif verbal, propre ou non à charmer mes sens ou à toucher mon âme, sans me soucier de savoir si, derrière ce dispositif, il y eût un coeur humain et s'il était sincère.[23]

Perhaps the most plausible attitude towards Cynthia lies somewhere in the middle ground between the literal biographical approach and the pure abstraction of her identity. G.P. Goold, Propertius' Loeb edition translator, succinctly expresses such an approach to the Cynthia figure:

> No doubt his [Propertius'] imagination was fuelled by some model or models who had a historical existence, but his relationship to her or them we cannot know. What we may assert is that Cynthia is Propertius' dream-girl, with an endowment of all that his mind could contrive: she is beautiful, high-born, intelligent, artistic, a poetess even; and of course passionate (and unresponsive), loyal (and treacherous and audacious) for both good and bad...[24]

While Goold does not deny the Cynthia figure some sort of existence as a single--or composite--woman who inspired the poet to create the elegies, he clearly rejects the biographical approach, and seems more closely aligned to Wyke's attitude. For Goold, Cynthia is only important as the

source and inspiration of Propertius' poetry, which exists of and in itself. This will also be the approach taken in this investigation.

Cynthia's Name.

A poet does not choose words--his tools--at random; it is therefore important to consider why Propertius may have decided to use the name Cynthia for his fictive mistress. In the choice of a name the poet undoubtedly says a great deal about how he wishes his beloved to be perceived by his reader.

The source of her name in mythology is not surprising, given that Propertius reveals a marked love for mythical allusions in his work; indeed, as has been suggested, perhaps excessive by modern standards of taste. The name Cynthia is one of the epithets of the Goddess Artemis, as she and her brother Apollo are said to have been born on the slopes of Mt. Cynthus on the island of Delos.[25] This verbal linkage of the poet's mistress with this Goddess lends her figure a certain complexity, since Artemis is a multi-faceted deity with attributes which at times seem self-contradictory.[26] She is, at the same time, virgin huntress and patroness and protector of animals. Although a virgin herself, she is also a fertility Goddess who presides over the birth of both animals and humans.[27]

Artemis, however, also has darker aspects: she causes

Actaeon, who inadvertently comes upon her as she is bathing, to be torn to pieces by his own dogs. Artemis and her brother Apollo destroy all the offspring of Niobe. Like her brother, she is a far-shooter; when women die suddenly, it is said that her arrows are the cause.[28] R. Bell summarizes the complex nature of the goddess succinctly:

> Artemis was the most complex of the Olympian deities, paradoxically compassionate and vengeful, nurturing and destructive, pacific and bloody.[29]

In the Roman context, Artemis is identified with the Italic Goddess Diana, who also has contradictory aspects. As Diana Egeria, she watches over childbirth and healing; but as Diana Nemorensis she is connected with ritual murder: the priest of her sacred grove at Nemi can only obtain his post by killing the incumbent. The name Cynthia is also associated with the triple goddess, a conflation of Diana, Cynthia/Luna and Hecate. While the triple goddess can seeen as sanctifying the three stages of woman's life--youth, maturity, and old age--she also comes to be associated with magic and dark powers.[30] Thus the name Cynthia, through its complex mythological resonances, sugests the complexity of the fictional woman that the poet wishes to evoke in his verses: a contradictory mixture of benign and maleficent qualities. What now remains to be seen is which qualities will dominate in the way her narrator presents her.

While the name of Cynthia in itself suggests a complex female personality even before one begins to examine

Propertius' poetry, the physical description of her figure, however, remains vague throughout the four books. She has merely the most conventional attributes of any pretty Roman woman: auburn hair, fair skin, dark eyes, long fingers, a good figure:

> fulva comast longaeque manus et maxima toto
> corpore, et incedit vel Iove digna soror. (II-2, 5-6)
>
> nec me tam facies quamvis sit candida cepit;
> lilia non domina sunt magis alba mea;
> nec de more geminae sidera nostra luces. (II-3, 9-14)

Her hair is tawny, and her fingers long, and her whole body voluptuous; and she goes forth, worthy to be sister to Jove.

Nor did her face attract me so much, although it is fair (lilies are not fairer than my mistress); nor her hair flowing elegantly over her neck; nor her eyes--twin torches, my stars.

Her accomplishments are equally conventional: she dances and sings, plays the lyre, and dabbles in poetry (II-3, 17-22). However, when the male lover/narrator describes Cynthia's behavior, a much more interesting picture emerges--one that says more about the male lover/narrator's attitude towards his mistress than about Cynthia herself.

Cynthia and her Lover.

That Cynthia is the unique source and inspiration of the poet's work, the very reason for its existence, is made clear to the reader in the very first words of the first verse of the first poem of Book I: Cynthia prima suis me cepit ocellis (Cynthia first captured me with her eyes)--it is her name that

appears first on the page. This line, which could serve as epigraph to Propertius' entire *oeuvre*, succinctly sets forth the terms of the relationship of the male lover/narrator with his fictive mistress Cynthia; it will be developed at length in the course of the four books of the elegies.

Not only does Cynthia's name stand first on the page; her primacy in the poetry is further emphasized by the adjective "prima." It is also clear right from the start that it is she who will play the active and dominant role: she is the one who captures (cepit) the narrator/male lover. Furthermore, the ambiguous nature of their relationship is suggested by the adjective by which he describes himself, "miserum." It is a surprising beginning for a cycle of love elegies: a mini-drama of conqueror and conquered has been suggested by the poet with his very first words, and it is the woman--not the man--who is the conqueror. The description of the relationship seems to be a rejection of the stereotypical perception of man as dominator, woman as dominated.

Even more surprising is the violent and unusual visual image which the narrator projects of himself. Not only has he been captured; Amor/Cupid also tramples on his head as he lies on the ground: a picture of abject helplesness and submission (et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus, 4; and Cupid trampled me, his feet planted on my head). What emerges in the rest of the first poem is that the narrator/male lover is intensely miserable and suffering. Conventionally enough, he

complains of his bitter nights (33); he appeals to practitioners of the magic arts to turn his mistress' face paler than his own wan lover's countenance (22). Then, however, his intense anger at his own abject state--as well as at womankind--bursts forth:

> fortiter et ferrum saevos patiemur et ignes
> sit modo libertas quae velit iral loqui.
> ferte per extremas gentes et ferte per undas
> qua non ulla meum femina norit iter. (27-30)

I will bravely endure the sword an cruel fires; let me only have the freedom to say what my anger wishes to. Take me to the farthest lands, and carry me through the waves, to where no woman may know my path.

It is a strange and ambiguous introduction to a cycle of poems that purports to deal with a love relationship. The reader may well ask himself whether it is merely designed to pique his or her interest in reading further through the use of the element of surprise; or, is the author inviting his reader to explore with him a dark and difficult fictional relationship between a man and a woman? The answer to this question will emerge from the poetry itself.

As it has been indicated earlier, the greater part of Propertius' poetic output deals, directly or indirectly, with the relationship between the narrator/male lover (the "I" of the poems) and his mistress Cynthia. If we read the four books of poetry as the chronicle of a fictive romance, and try to discern a pattern within it, a somewhat bleak picture--not belied by its unusual introductioan in I-1--emerges. What is perhaps most striking about it is that there are so very few

moments of genuine fulfillment, happiness, or joy in this fictive romance. One such rare moment, unclouded by any dark feelings on the narrator's part, occurs in III-10, a poem on the occasion of Cynthia's birthday. The narrator is awakened by the Muses at the crack of dawn; he expresses a wish that the day may be an altogether happy one for his beloved, whom he sees as a woman born under a fortunate sign;

> tuque, o cara mihi felicibus edita pennis,
> surge, et poscentis iusta precare deos. (11-12)

And you, who are dear to me, born under happy auspices, arise, and pray duly to the gods.

She is to array herself, and spend the day in performing appropriate religious rites, while the evening is to be passed in feasting, drinking, dicing and enjoying music. The night is to end with the two lovers in bed together:

> cum fuerit multis exacta trientibus hora
> noctis, et instituet sacra ministra Venus,
> annua solvamus thalamo solemnia nostro,
> natalisque tui sic peragamus iter. (29-32)

When the hours have passed in many cups, and Venus prepares the sacred rites of the night, let us perform our yearly ceremony on our couch--and thus let us journey through the day of your birth.

Poem II-15 is a rare expression of triumphant delight at the joys of a happy sexual union between the narrator/lover and Cynthia:

> o me felicem, nox o candida, et o tu
> lectule, deliciis facte beata meis!
> quam multa apposita narramus verba lucerna,
> quantoque sublato lumine rixa fuit! (1-4)

Oh happy me, and oh night, glowing for me! And oh little bed, made blessed through my delight! How many words we spoke with the lamp placed beside us; and what skirmishes there were

when the light was put out!

Yet even this joyful exclamation ends on a wistful note; at the end of the poem, the narrator speaks of the brevity of pleasure and of life itself:

> tu modo dum lucet fructum ne desere vitae;
> omnia si dederis oscula, pauca dabis.
> ac veluti folia arentis liquere corollas
> quae passim calathis strata natare vides,
> sic nobis qui nunc magnum spiramus amantes
> forsitan includet crastina fata dies. (49-54)

Only do not, while yet there is light, abandon the enjoyment of life. If you give me all your kisses, they will be too few. And just as petals, which you see floating in cups, strewn here and there, fall from withering garlands--so it is for us lovers, who now breathe forth our love--perhaps fate will cut off our days tomorrow.

In II-3, the narrator briefly admits to being caught in the snare of love, and thus not entirely in control: haesisti, cecidit spiritus ille tuus (you have been caught, your spirit has been conquered, 2). However, the rest of the poem amounts to unstinted, happily extravagant praise of his mistress: her complexion is like rose petals floating in milk (16); she is a gifted dancer, musician, even poet (17-22). In short, she is more divine than human:

> non, non humani partus sunt talia dona;
> ista decem menses non peperere bona;
> gloria Romanis una es tu nata puellis,
> post Helenam haec terris forma secunda redit. (27-30)

No, no, such gifts do not come from human birth; ten months did not bring forth such marvels. You alone were born to be the glory of Roman maidenhood: after Helen, such a second beauty returns to the earth.

But such moments of unadulterated pleasure are rare indeed; usually they are tinged with some darker and more

complex emotion. Thus II-8 appears at first to be a simple exclamation of delight on the narrator's part, when he learns that Cynthia has abandoned her plans for a projected voyage away from Rome; the two lovers will, after all, not be separated:

> illi carus ego et per me carissima Roma
> dicitur, et sine me dulcia regna negat
> illa vel angusto mecum requiescere lecto,
> et quocumque modo maluit esse mea. (31-34)

I am dear to her, and, through me, Rome is dearest to her, and she renounces sweet kingdoms for my sake; she has preferred to stay in my narrow bed mith me, whatsover means I may have.

The reality behind this happy outburst, however, is that Cynthia has, in fact, nearly abandoned her lover in order to depart for Illyria with another, a richer and more powerful man (see also the preceding poem, III-8, which sets the stage for the happy outcome of III-9). Things have turned out well after all; but a separation could easily have taken place. Thus the reader catches a glimpse of the tenuous nature of the fictive romance between the lover and the mistress, despite the narrator/lover's momentary happiness at his reprieve.

Indeed, the theme of separation keeps recurring throughout the entire cycle of Cynthia poems. In I-13, the narrator/lover insists that Cynthia is everything to him, the alpha and the omega: Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit (Cynthia was the first, Cynthia will be the last, 20). She has, nonetheless, left her lover, and he is forced to spend his bitter nights alone (13). In another poem, II-33a, she

keeps the poet in sexual torment, as she practices the rites of Isis in temporary sexual abstinence for ten nights. It should be noted, however, that this is not a serious split between the pair: the narrator promises his mistress three bouts of sex in one night upon their reunion:

> at tu quae nostro nimium pia causa doloris es,
> noctibus his vacui ter faciamus iter. (21-22)

But you who, through an excess of piety, are the cause of my pain--once released from these nights, let us make our journey thrice.

At times it is the narrator/lover himself who has caused the separation. In I-17, he envisions himself shipwrecked somewhere on an unknown shore, addressing the lonely sea-gulls (nunc ego desertas alloquor alcyonas, 2). For an unknown reason he has fled from his mistress and Rome. In the following poem (I-18), too, the theme is separation and solitude. This time the narator has placed himself in a lonely rustic setting. Disdained by Cynthia, he pours out his grief in deserted grove; his only listeners are the mute rocks and the breeze:

> haec certe deserta loca et taciturna querenti
> et vacuum Zephyri possidet aura nemus.
> hic licet occultos proferre impune dolores
> si modo sola queant saxa tenere fidem. (1-4)

This surely is a deserted and silent place for my complaint, and the breath of Zephyr possesses the empty grove. Here, without penalty, one can pour forth hidden grief, if only the lonely rocks will keep their faith.

It is the wistful complaint of the rejected male lover who seeks solace in nature, perhaps not entirely serious; a theme that became a favorite, centuries later, in European Romantic

poetry.

Most of the time, however, the fictive relationship of the narrator/lover and Cynthia displays a darker edge. The narrator/lover has what can perhaps best be described as sado-masochistic tendencies. In III-8, the reader learns that Cynthia has a violent temper, which manifests itself in the form of physical attacks on her male partner, something that he evidently enjoys. Indeed, physical violence seems to be an integral part of their love-making:

> dulcis ad hesternas fuerat mihi rixa lucernas
> vocis et insanae tot maledicta tuae.
> tu vero nostros audax invade capillos
> et mea formosis unguibus ora nota.
> tu minitare oculos subiecta exurere flamma
> fac mea rescisso pectora nuda sinu. (1-8)

Our fight by lamplight yesterday was sweet for me, as well as the curses of your furious voice. Truly, dare to attack my hair and mark my face with your lovely nails; threaten to burn my eyes with fire; tear my tunic, leaving my breast bared.

Her violence, in modern terms, also suggests a curious gender reversal between Cynthia and the narrator/lover, since in most cases of physical abuse between couples, the woman tends to be the victim, as the male is often physically stronger. Propertius' narrator/lover, then, seems to be denigrating himself by casting himself in the role of the weaker partner. Nonetheless, while admitting to a penchant for sexual pleasure derived from physical pain, the narrator/lover at the same time also denigrates Cynthia to his friends for being violent, as he urges them to beware of her. In I-5, he addresses his friend Gallus thus:

quid tibi vis, insane, meae sentire furores
infelix properas ultima nosse mala,
et miser ignotos vestigia ferre per ignes. (1-3)

Why do you want to feel the fury of my girl, crazy man? Poor you, you hasten to learn the ultimate evils, to carry your footsteps through unknown fires.

The narrator also stresses the fact that his mistress is both faithless and undependable, changing her lovers at will; yet, at the same time he swears endless faith to her, thus emerging as a somewhat abject and impotent figure. In II-5 he deplores her lack of constancy:

hoc verumst tota te ferri Cynthia Roma
et non ignota vivere nequitia;
haec merui sperare? dabis mihi perfida poenas
et nobis aliquo Cynthia ventus erit. (I-4)

Is it true, Cynthia, that you are talked about throughout all Rome, and that you live in public shame? Did I deserve to hope for this? Treacherous woman, you will pay for this, and there will be a wind to take me elsewhere.

Yet two poems later, in II-7, he swears absolute faith and endless love to her:

nos uxor numquam numquam seducet amica;
semper amica mihi semper et uxor eris. (1-2)

A mistress will never seduce me, my wife; always you will be both my mistress and wife.

Thus the relationship between them is one in which the narrator/male lover is constantly torn apart by contradictory emotions. At times he is also overwhelmed by an all-consuming jealousy; in II-6, he admits his irrational suspicion of everyone:

me iuvenum pictae facies me nomina laedunt;
me tener in cunis et sine voce puer;
me laedet si multa te dabit oscula mater;
me soror et quando dormit amica simul;

omnia me laedeunt...(9-13)

The bright faces of youths hurt me; their very names hurt me; the tiny speechless infant in the cradle hurts me; your mother will hurt me if she gives you many kisses; so will you sister, or a girlfriend who sleeps eith you--everything will hurt me.

At other times he falls into a morbid contemplation of his own death. In II-25, it leads him to a sentimental vision of Cynthia mourning his demise:

tum me compones et dices, ossa Properti
haec tua sunt, eheu, tu mihi certus eras;
certus eras, eheu, quamvis nec sanguine avido
nobilis et quamvis non ita dives eras. (35-38)

Then you will lay me out, and say, "These bones are yours, Propertius; alas, you were faithful to me; alas, you were true, though you were not of noble birth, and not so very rich."

In other instances, however, his morbid vision is visited by a harsh Cynthia gloating over his death. In II-8, the narrator exclaims:

sed morere; interitu gaudeat illa tuo
exagitet nostros manes sectatura et umbras
insultetque rogis calcet et ossa mea. (18-20)

So die; let her rejoice at your burial; let her disturb your ghost, and let her insult the shade from your pyre, and let her stamp on my bones.

Yet at other times his anger gains the upper hand. In II-11, instead of sentimentally lamenting his own dead self, he envisions instead his mistress dead and in the grave, and dismisses her with the vindictive remark:

auferet extremi funeris atra dies,
et tua transibit contemnens ossa viator,
nec dicet, cinis hic docta puella fuit. (4-6)

The dark day of you demise will bear you away; and the traveler will pass with contempt over your bones, nor will he

say, "These ashes were once a learned girl."

In summary, then, the relationship between the narrator/lover and Cynthia which the poet Propertius has created is a complex, difficult and painful one. Throughout the first three books of the poems, the lovers seldom enjoy mutual happiness; their fictive love-affair if a chronicle of misery and torment for the male lover. The reader is left with a sad sense of a vast gulf, never to be crossed, between Propertius' male lover and the woman in the text.

The last poem in Book III seems to represent a final split between the narrator/lover and Cynthia--in effect, the end of their fictive relationship. Here the narrator rejects his mistress, and reneges all the praise he has bestowed on her throughout the three books of poetry; he renounces all the love he may ever have felt for her, and seems to turn away from her in disgust:

> mixtam te varia laudavi saepe figura,
> ut quod non esses esse putaret amor,
> et color est totiens roseo collatus Eoo
> cum tibi quaesitus candor in ora fuit. (5-8)

I praised your qualities in many ways, so that my love thought that wou were what you are not; and so many times I compared your coloring to the dawn, when a bought glow was on your countenance.

He, moreover, ends the poem, and the affair, with an angry curse:

> at te celatis aetas gravis urgeat annis,
> et veniat formae ruga sinistra tuae;
> vellere tum cupias albos a stirpe capillos
> iam speculo rugas increpitante tibi;
> exclusa inque vicem fastus patiare superbos
> et quae fecisti facta queraris anus.

has tibi fatalis cecinit mea pagina diras
eventum formae disce timere tuae.

But may old age oppress you with the years you have disguised; and may gruesome wrinkles come to your beauty. Then you may wish to tear out your white hairs from their roots, now that the mirror reproaches you with your wrinkles. And may you, in turn, suffer, excluded, haughty disdain; and may you lament, an old woman, the deeds you have done. My pages have pronounced such dire omens to you--learn to fear the end of your beauty!

The troubled relationship has reached its logical outcome; it has come to its bitter end in anger and curses.

That Propertius may, in fact, have intended this poem as an end to his cycle of Cynthia poems is suggested by the fact that he seems to be bringing in deliberate verbal echoes of its beginning, that is, poem I-1; in short, he seems to be bringing the relationship full circle in a kind of ring composition. Thus, as in I-1, he once more employs the image of fire and the sword (11; cf.I-1, 27), and refers to magic and witchcraft (10; cf.I-1, 19-23). The poem seems to be a way of signaling the end of the poet's preoccupation with the genre of love elegy. In Book IV of his poems, in fact, Propertius turns chiefly to Roman themes; he clearly states his intent to do so in the first poem:

Roma fave; tibi surget opus; date candida cives
omina, et inceptis dextera cantet avis.
sacra deosque canam et cognomina prisca locorum;
has meas ad metas sudet oportet equus. (67-70)

Rome, favor me; my work rises forth for you. Grant me good omens, citizens; and let a bird sing favorably on behalf of what I have begun. I shall sing of the sacred rites of the gods, and of the ancient names of places; may my sweating horse press on to this goal.

The majority of the twelve poems in this book, in fact,

take up the patriotic task he has chosen for himself. He writes about the native god Vertumnus (IV-2); the legend of Tarpeia (IV-4); the founding of the Ara Maxima by Hercules (IV-9); the legend of Jupiter Feretrius (IV-10); and finally he creates an ingenious funeral oration delivered on her own behalf by a dead aristocratic Roman matron, Cornelia (IV-12). However, the jokers in the pack, so to speak, are poems IV-7 and 8: Cynthia returns to Propertius' poetry yet once more, this time in unexpected guise.

In IV-7, perhaps Propertius' most remarkable achievement, the poet has, as it were, killed her and consigned her to the realm of the shades: she returns as a ghost, after her cremation, to her erstwhile lover's couch. The remarkable visual imagery in the presentation of this ghost will be discussed briefly later in this chapter when I deal with the relationship of Propertius' poetry and visual art. It must, however, be noted here that, even from beyond the grave, Cynthia holds the same power over the narrator that she held during their long and difficult relationship depicted in the previous three books.

When she appears to the narrator, she begins a long tirade with reproaches agains him:

> perfide, nec cuiquam melior sperande puellae;
> in te iam vires somnus habere potest
> foederis, heu, pacti cuius fallacia verba
> non audituri diripuere Noti. (21-24)

Faithless man, from whom no girl can hope for better, can slumber already have power over you? Alas, the South winds, not listening, have torn apart the deceitful words of your

pact.

She ends the tirade with an ominous promise to meet her living former lover Propertius in the grave, after his death (93-94), despite his involvement with new living mistresses. And in the last lines of the poem--frightening as her apparition is--he yet attempts to embrace the ghost-woman:

> haec postquam querulo mecum sub lite peregit
> inter complexus excidit umbra meos. (95-96)

After she had finished her querulous indictment of me, her shade slipped fom my embrace.

Clearly the power that Cynthia exerted as a living woman is still there; the presumed break between them, as well as death itself, have not exorcized her presence in the narrator's mind and heart.

The most curious aspect of Book IV, however, is the presence of poem 8, and its placement directly after the ghost poem. Here Cynthia is resurrected from the grave once again, and seems to be entirely her old self, just as she appeared in the three earlier books. In contrast to the macabre ghost-poem preceding it, this poem is an amusing and self-deprecatory account of the narrator's attempt to hold a clandestine party in the company of a couple of prostitutes during Cynthia's absence from town. He finds, however, that cannot really enjoy himself; and--suddenly Cynthia herself appears in the doorway. Bad-tempered as always, she is angry at the narrator's peccadilloes; and, as ever before, he finds her attractive, even in her anger:

nec mora cum totas resupinat Cynthia valvos;
non operosa comis sed furibunda decens;
pocula mi digitos inter cecidere remissos
palluerunt ipso labra soluta mero. (51-54)

At once Cynthia opened the folding doors, her hair disarrayed, but attractive in her fury. The cup fell from my slack fingers, and my lips, loosed by the wine, grew pale.

Like a virago, she straightway ejects the prostitutes, fumigates the room, and--once again--beats up the narrator. The poem ends with the narrator and Cynthia in bed once again:

atque ita per mutato per singula pallia lecto
despondi, et noto solvimus arma toro. (87-88)

And so, once all the covers had been changed one by one, I made my promise; and we laid aside our weapons on our familiar couch.

And thus, once more, the pair are back together again; the whole affair seems to be beginning once more, and the reader is back at poem I-1, as it were.

It is, of course, possible, that both IV-7 and 8 were written at some point earlier in Propertius' poetic career, and do not belong chronologically in this book, but were inserted by someone other than Propertius himself. It is, nonetheless, equally possible that they are deliberate, not accidental, inclusions. If so, their presence here is tantalizingly ambiguous. Is the poet merely saying that he can destroy and recreate his characters at will, since they have no real existence except as fictional creations over whom he has total control? Or is he playing a more complex game with his reader, suggesting a kind of *éternel retour* of the doomed sexual relationship he has been describing, fated to

run the same course over and over again? If so, he seems to be toying with the idea of the existence of a fantastic alternate reality, such as appears in Campanian Second Style painting, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Nonetheless, if one looks at the fictive relationship between man and woman that Propertius has created in his poetry, it is ultimately the chronicle of a failure. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the moments within Propertius' poetry when the male lover and Cynthia meet in mutual happiness are few and far between indeed. The picture of male-female relationships that emerges is, rather, a bleak one. The male lover twists and turns about in anger and misery, flagellating himself for his own impotence in the face of his dominant mistress, whose power over him he cannot escape, even after death. The reader of Propertius is left, at the end, with the feeling that the vast gulf between the sexes may ultimately never be crossed. The work of Propertius thus reveals the same dark and pessimistic view of the relationship between men and women that is found in Lucretius' Book IV and Catullus *carmen* 63, which have been discussed in the previous two chapters.

Propertius' Poetry and Campanian Painting

In reading Propertius' poetry it is hard to avoid noticing its markedly visual nature. In this part of the

chapter I will first examine Propertius' "*tempérament visuel*", to use J.P. Boucher's phrase, and then will proceed to discuss the relationship between his poetry and contemporary wall painting. It is my contention that the two are closely linked, and in fact derive from a common aesthetic. To clarify this relationship, a brief summary of what is known about extant wall painting is in order.

Ironically, this discussion must begin with a disclaimer. Although the paintings surviving from the period of the late Republic and the early Empire are loosely termed "Roman" for the sake of convenience, the epithet "Campanian" is more accurate. There are in existence a few wall paintings which have been found in Rome itself[31] (e.g. decorations from the House of Livia, the impressionistic Ulysses landscapes at the Vatican Museum, and the so-called Aldobrandini Wedding, all highly skilled and sophisticated works). Almost all other examples of extant wall painting, however, have been excavated from the area surrounding Mt.Vesuvius in Campania, specifically Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae. Other important finds have come to light at Oplontis and at the villas of Boscoreale and Boscotrecase.

The eruption of the volcano of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79, vividly described by the younger Pliny,[32] was a great tragedy in terms of the loss of human lives and the destruction of property.[33] This disaster, however, has been a godsend not only to the social historian, but also to the historian of

art. Pompeii and the surrounding area were covered by a thick mass of fine lapilli and volcanic ash emitted from the cone of the volcano, to remain undisturbed for centuries.[34] Herculaneum, on the other hand, was submerged under a flow of molten lava which eventually hardened, making it even harder to unearth.[35]

The process of uncovering the buried sites brought forth not only a variety of artifacts invaluable for understanding the daily life of provincial Roman towns, but also revealed the great variety of paintings, many undamaged, which decorated the walls of both public buildings and private dwellings. It is on these, together with the rare surviving examples from Rome itself, that present-day knowledge of the wall painting, which should perhaps most accurately be called Romano-Campanian, is based.

There is, of course, a striking difference between Rome and Campania: Rome, center of power and culture in the Mediteranean world; Campania, the provinces. However, if art tends to emanate from the great cities, it does eventually reach provincial centers, although probably with a certain time-lag. Since the paintings of Campania no doubt reflect the paintings to be found in Rome, and indeed represent the kind of visual art that Propertius saw in Rome during his lifetime, they thus can be used as visual evidence for making the connections between Propertius' poetry and visual art.

The Campanian Painting Styles.

It is important to note that Campanian wall painting is not a monolithic whole, but over the course of time displays a great variety of technique, subject matter, and taste. In order to clarify the changes and developments that took place in Campanian wall painting, the German art historian A. Mau attempted to classify the corpus of wall paintings uncovered in the course of the excavations in Campania into the so-called Four Styles of Pompeiian Painting, a highly useful guide for the student of ancient art.[36] This classification was not meant to be a rigid taxonomy, but rather, as A. Maiuri puts it, a kind of graph whereby the irregular evolution of Campanian wall painting may be charted.[37] A brief summary of the Four Styles follows, so that the connection between Propertius' poetry and wall painting may be fitted into a plausible temporal framework.

The First Style, which has no direct bearing on the content of this chapter, was popular throughout the Mediterranean world during the second century B.C. It consists in an effort to build up, color and polish walls so that they give the effect of being covered with multicolored marble slabs.[38]

The Second Style, dominant during the first century B.C. until about its last decade, represents a veritable revolution in the decoration of walls. In brief, figurative painting

makes its first appearance. This is not ground-breaking in itself; it is well known that Greek temples and public buildings had been decorated for centuries with realistic representations of human, animal and vegetal forms. Furthermore, the native Italic, and especially the Etruscan, traditions of figurative painting[39] cannot have been entirely unknown to the artists and artisans entrusted with decorating the interior walls of public or private buildings in Campania. What is revolutionary, however, is that painters working in the Second Style were not merly content to cover the walls with figures, but rather attempted to create the illusion of space beyond the confines of the wall: to paint an alternate reality, as it were. It is this creation of an alternate reality which relates the poetry of Propertius to the Second Style, as I will argue later in this chapter.

The Third Style is also relevant to this chapter, though to a lesser degree; some of its characteristics seem to appear in Propertius' poetry. It is dominant in Campanian painting from the last decade of the first century B.C. up to the *terminus ad quem* of 62 A.D. It is in this year that an earthquake, a presage of the volcanic eruption of 79 A.D., damaged a great many buildings in Pompeii, causing them to be redecorated, often in this new so-called Third Style. Although chronologically it coincides with the latter part of Propertius' poetic career, it is possible that some experimentation with this style may have taken place in Rome

at an earlier period, and that Propertius, too, may have may have had some interest in this new and ground-breaking aesthetic. It is a style of fantasy; as Maiuri has pointed out, it aims chiefly at purely ornamental effect. All pretense of reality is gone. Flat fields of intense color (black, ochre, green, golden yellow) dominate; the realistic has been turned into the purely decorative.[40] Such fantasy also appears at times in Propertius' poems, and will be discussed later.

Thus, since Propertius lived c. 50 B.C. to c. 11 B.C., it is plausible, given the rough time-frame of the Second and Third Styles, that an aesthetic connection be made between his poetry and these two styles; chiefly to the Second, and, to a lesser degree, to the Third. Since the Fourth Style, which flourished in the brief period between 62 and 79 A.D., postdates the artistic output of Propertius, it is not directly relevant to this chapter. It suffices to say that this style represents a blending of the Second and Third Styles; Maiuri characterizes it as a compromise between decorative and three-dimensional composition.[41] In the Fourth Style there seems to be, moreover, a trend to experimentation with light and its sources. One can only, unfortunately, conjecture to what discoveries this experimentation might eventually have led.

The Visual Images in Propertius' Poetry.

That Propertius' poetry is characterized by highly visual images cannot be denied. It is not that he gives concise descriptions of scenes or objects; it is rather that he suggests images which the reader has then to develop for himself in his own visual imagination, and these suggestive images are often very vivid. A striking example of such an image is the scene shown in I-3. The drunken lover has come late--and drunk--from a party to to his sleeping mistress. The scene is made pictorially vivid by seemingly minor details. Cynthia sleeps with her head leaning on her intertwined arms (Cynthia consertis nixa caput manibus, 8); and the verbal picture of her drunken lover decorating the sleeping form of his beloved with banquet garlands and placing apples in her hands is truly worthy of a painter:

> et modo solvebam nostras de fronte corollas,
> ponebam tuisque Cynthia temporibus;
> nunc furtive curvis poma dabam manibus
> et modo gaudebam lapsos formare capillos
> omnia quae ingrato largibar munera somno. (21-25)

And now I loosed the garlands from my brow, and placed them, Cynthia, on your temples; and now I took pleasure in smoothing your disarranged hair, and now I stealthily gave you apples from my hand--all these things I bestowed on you in your sleep.

The other detail that individualizes the pictorial scene is the moonlight falling through the window-panes. The moon itself becomes an active living presence as it wakes Cynthia:

> donec diversas praecurrens luna fenestras,
> luna moraturis sedula luminibus
> compositos levibus radiis patefacit ocellos. (31-33)

At length the moon, running by the unshuttered windows--the officious moon, with lingering light, opened her closed

eyes with her gentle rays.

The subtle play of light in the chamber is not difficult to visualize by the reader.

Equally attractive are the visual suggestions in III-10, one of the few genuinely happy and lighthearted poems in the four books. It is the morning of Cynthia's birthday; the reader sees the narrator/male lover on his sleeping-couch, lit by the rosy light of dawn, surrounded by the Muses clapping their hands to inform him of the importance of the day:

> mirabar quidnam visissent mane Camenae
> ante meum stantes sole rubente torum.
> natalis nostrae signum misere puellae
> et manibus faustos ter crepuisse sonos. (1-4)

I wondered why the Muses had visited me, standing by my couch as the sun grew rosy; they sent me notice of my girl's birthday, and thrice clapped their hands with propitious sound.

Another vivid visual scene, originating, on the contrary, in Propertius' darker strain, is III-7, a lament on a certain Paetus, whose identity or relationship to Propertius has not been established. The poem contains a graphic description of Paetus' death by drowning on the open sea when the merchant ship on which he is sailing is shipwrecked. M. Hubbard aptly describes the poem as "bizarre and troubling".[42] The vivid visual image of the youth (here called "boy" or "little one", 53) at the moment before being sucked down by a whirlpool is indeed disturbing:

> hunc parvo ferri vidit nox improba ligno
> et miser invisam traxit hiatus aquam;
> huic fluctus viro radicitus abstulit ungues.
> Paetus ut occideret tot coiere mala

flens tamen dedit haec mandata querelis
cum moribunda niger clauderet ora liquor. (51-56)

The wicked night saw the boy borne on a little plank; and the poor youth gulped in his mouth the hateful water; the flood tore away his nails by the roots. So many ills connived in Paetus' death. Weeping, he gave forth these pleas, lamenting as the black water stopped his mouth.

Although in the next few verses the poet gives Paetus a voice as he speaks out his expiring prayer, this scene is less a drama than a tableau. Again, the reader does not need to strain his imagination to visualize it.

Much in the same strain is another disturbing and visually powerful scene, the visit of Cynthia's ghost to the narrator/male lover's bed in IV-7 (also to be discussed briefly in another context in the last part of this chapter). The greater part of the long poem (96 lines) is taken up by the ghost's harangue; Propertius has given the dead Cynthia a voice, an a loud one at that. However, in the first part of the poem, which describes the appearance of the ghost, Propertius conjures up a macabre visual tableau. The horror of the picture lies in the fact that the ghost is not an insubstantial shade (like Homer's Patroclus, or Virgil's Dido); it is the animated corpse of a woman recently cremated. She retains a kind of flesh-and-blood-appearance, though affected by the crematory fires:

eosdem habuit secum quibus est elata capillos;
eosdem oculos lateri vestis adusta fuit;
et solitum digita beryllon adederat ignis,
summaque Lethaeus triverat ora liquor.
spirantisque animos et vocem misit at illi
pollicibus fragiles increpuere manus. (7-12)

She had the same hair as when she was carried off, the same eyes; her dress was scorched on her flank, and the fire had gnawed at the familiar beryl on her finger, and the waters of Lethe had withered away her lips. She gave forth a living breath and voice; but her fragile fingers rattled on her hands.

Another vivid--and horrific--visual tableau, created by the poet's words.

The four examples mentioned above demonstrate how close Propertius comes to the painter's art in his poetry. That his marked visual sensibility is an integral aspect of Propertius' poetic art has already been remarked upon both by J.P. Boucher and by M. Hubbard; and that he was at times inspired by specific works of visual art, as M. Hubbard has argued,[43] seems evident, since there are direct references to paintings in his poetry. For example, II-12 begins with the lines:

quicumque ille fuit puerum qui pinxit Amorem
nonne putas miras hunc habuisse manus? (1-2)

Whoever he was that painted the boy Amor, don't you think that he had marvelous hands...

In II-6, the narrator, while not alluding to a specific painting, attacks what he calls "obscenas tabellas", which, he claims somewhat coyly, has corrupted virtuous Roman girls:

quae manus obscenas depinxit prima tabellas
et posuit casto turpia visa domo,
illa puellarum ingenuos corrupit ocellos
nequitiaeque sunt noluit esse rudis.
ah, gemat in tenebris ista quae protulit arte
orgia sub tacita condita laetitia. (27-32)

The hand which first painted lewd pictures and placed the sinful things within chaste homes--that hand corrupted the innocent eyes of girls, and did not let them remain ignorant of his depravity. Ah, may he groan in darkness, he who brought forth with his art the mysteries concealed in secret bliss.

It should be noted that this is hardly a serious indictment of obscene art; the poem is written tongue-in-cheek. What the poet refers to is evidently explicitly erotic art, many examples of which were unearthed in Pompeii, varying from the delicate and skillful to the crude and tasteless.[44] Evidently a similar taste for erotica existed in the more sophisticated center of the Empire.

Hubbard has drawn attention to a link between II-26A, the narrator/male lover's dream vision of Cynthia drowning, and a painting of Helle slipping from the back of the golden ram (National Museum, Naples).[45] Mythological subjects such as this were commonplace in Campanian painting, and multiple copies of an original work were evidently made by more or less skillful painters at their patrons' behest.[46] It is not unlikely, then, that Propertius had seen some such variant of the Helle painting in Rome.

Poem II-29 also seems to be inspired by a visual depiction of cupids, possibly comic--a popular theme in wall decoration.[47] On the walls of the well-preserved House of the Vetii at Pompeii, cupids engage in household tasks, or ride on marine animals which serve the function of ponies or horses. The pictures are amusing and innocuous, and recall nothing more serious than present-day cartoon characters used to decorate children's rooms. Propertius' poem shows a tableau of such minuscule naked *erotes* surrounding and arresting the narrator as wanders about at night, far from his

mistress' house. The poem is trivial but charming: the cupids are pictured as a horde of tiny boys (nescio quot pueri...minuti, 3), who call the protagonist stupid (inepte, 14).

The visual image is vivid: against the dark background of the night, the naked cupids are presented as a miniature army or police force, armed with appropriate weapons:

> quorum alii faculas alii retinere sagittas,
> pars etiam visast vincla parare mihi,
> sed nudi fuerant...(5-7)

Some of them held little torches, some arrows; some even seemed to be preparing fetters for me; but they were naked. They first throw a noose around the narrator's neck (10), and then the mantle which he has lost in the scuffle with them, before sending him off to his mistress. This verbal tableau, too, suggests a specific visual source; it is not unlikely that such paintings, perhaps simply best described as cute, appealed to a certain popular taste in Rome.

Thus several poems can probably be linked to specific--albeit not extant, paintings. Furthermore, isolated visual images, sometimes in unexpected contexts, seem to betray a visual imagination which is all-pervasive in Propertius' work, as Boucher has argued.[48] Thus in II-28, for example, a poem cast in the form of a prayer to Jupiter on behalf of Cynthia because she lies mortally ill, four brief lines suffice to create an eerie impressionistic tableau painted in somber tones:

> deficiunt magico torti sub carmine rhombi,

et iacet extincto laurus adusta foco,
et iam luna negat descendere caelo
nigraque funestem concinit omen avis. (35-38)

The whirligigs spun to the magic chant cease; and now the charred laurel lies on the dead hearth; and now the moon refuses to descend from the sky; and the black bird cries out a dire omen.

An even more eerie, and unforgettable, visual image is conveyed by two brief lines in I-19. Here reference is made to the myth of Protesilaus, granted a last visit from the realm of shades to visit his bride Laodamia after his death:

sed cupidus falsis attingere gaudia palmis
Thessalis antiquam venerat umbra domum. (9-10)

But lusting to touch his beloved with his false palms, the Thessalian's shade came to his ancient home.

It is not difficult to conjure up the vision of a stately dwelling and the flickering shade stretching forth its insubstantial hands to his living bride.

That there is a strong link between visual art and the poetry of Propertius seems evident. Hubbard, however, goes a step further; she argues that his visual imagination is so strongly affected by visual art that it is to a great extent defined by it:

The imagination of Propertius is limited by the scope of the painter or sculptor; but everything goes to show that within this limit it was more liberally nourished by acquaintance with, and indeed knowledge of, painting and sculpture than that of any other Augustan poet, so much so indeed that the images of nature unmodified by a painter's skill make little appearance in his work....Time and time again, when Propertius sees most vividly, he sees not the actual and contemporary in itself, but the ideal and sharp presentation of something like.[49]

Hubbard thus suggests that the relationship between

Propertius' poetry and visual art is intimate and goes far beyond the predilection for visual imagery on the poet's part, although she does not develop this point. In the next part of this chapter, this relationship will be examined in more detail, in order to show that Propertius' poetry and contemporary wall paintings partake of a common aesthetic which transcends the boundaries of visual and literary art.

Propertius' Poetry and Landscape.

Campanian wall painting was, by its nature, a purely decorative art, its function to beautify the interiors of public buildings or private dwellings. As such, it was limited only by the tastes, or whims, of those who commissioned the wall decorations, and by the dictates of current fashion. It is not surprising, then, that a vast range of subject matter is to be found in the paintings which have survived: scenes drawn from mythology and epic, depictions of still life, peaceful garden scenes, or imaginative tableaux of exotic Nilotic flora and fauna.[50] Surprisingly, there seems to be little interest in realistic depiction of landscape. Why this should be so can only be a matter of conjecture. It is possible that this is the result of the joint artistic influence of Greek vase painting, where landscape elements are reduced to a minimum in favor of the human figure, and Etruscan tomb painting, where they are often

abstracted and reduced to decorative motifs.[51]

The landscape elements which do appear in Campanian wall painting tend to be impressionistic rather than realistic. Landscape elements are frequently used in mythological scenes, but as a rule they serve merely as a backdrop, often abstracted and reduced to a few basic elements.[52] On the other hand, in the remarkable so-called Odyssey landscapes,[53] the importance of the small, sketchy human figures is minimal, while the landscapes dominate. These landscapes, however, have no relationship to gegraphical reality; they are bold, suggestive images of fantastic lands, suffused by eerie, unearthly light. Such qualities are also to be found in Propertius' poetry, and will be discussed further in the sections which deal with its relationship to Second and Third Style Painting.

Among Campanian wall paintings there exists a genre generally referred to as Sacral-Idyllic landscape. It is these paintings in particular that can be demonstrably linked to Propertius' visual imagination; it is not unlikely that he was familiar with such paintings, and possibly inspired by them when he wrote some of the poems. These paintings depict idealized landscapes in bucolic settings. Figures of shepherds or rustics are usually present; the details of the Sacral-Idyllic landscapes tend to be sparse and abbreviated, but generally include a rustic shrine of some sort.

Thus, for example, the so-called Landscape with Mystical

Temple from the villa of Agrippa Postumus[54] features a triangular composition, its apex a single tree, before which stands a tall column surmounted by an urn. Worshippers approach a seated priestess from the right of the painting; on the left is depicted a shepherd with a flock of goats in front of a wall, which ends abruptly. The scene appears strangely ethereal, a kind of floating landscape on the white background of the wall. The figures of the humans and the animals seem to have no emotional significance in themselves; they serve merely as decorative elements in the composition. Another such painting[55] shows a shepherd guiding a ram towards a shrine as goats graze nearby. In the background one sees windswept trees and rocky cliffs. The figures here are highly impressionistic, drawn in by a very few brush strokes.

Another example of the genre, probably a later one, depicts a complex of shrines of varying sizes;[56] a statue of a female deity stands in front-central position; oxen graze to the right, and on the left a goat follows a solitary male figure over a bridge, which seems to float in mid-air. The whole is suffused with an eerie blue light which blends into the dark green of the grass.

It is obvious that these Sacral-Idyllic landscapes do not represent the real countryside; while based on what are probably real country scenes, they are, rather, depictions of an ideal vision of pristine purity, untouched by the mundane realities of day-to-day existence. As such, they offer a

glimpse into an alternate realiity, a landscape of dreams. Maiuri gives a description of the genre which beautifully captures its essence[57]:

> Seen against the light, in a quivering haze of broken gleams, the landscape seems the fabric of a dream that would promptly vanish like an unsubstantial pageant, were that play of light and shade to cease.

It is such a world that Propertius seems at times to glimpse and to convey through brief images in his poetry. He depicts a scene very similar to the paintings described above in III-13. Here he praises the rustic simplicity of days gone by; the idealized scene is a pure and as unreal:

> felix agrestum quondam parata iuventus
> divitiae quorum messis et arbor erant.
> illis munus est decussa Cydonia ramo
> et dare puniceis plena canistra rubis;
> nunc violas tondere manu, nunc mixta referre
> lilia vimineos lucida per calathos,
> et portare suis vestitas frondibus uvas
> aut variam plumae versicoloris avem. (25-32)

Once upon a time rural youth lived happily in peace; their riches were the harvest and the trees. Their presents were quinces shaken from the branch, and baskets, given full of red bramble-berries. Now they picked violets with their hands; now they brought bright lilies in wicker baskets; and they brought grapes enrobed in their leaves, or a speckled bird with multicolored feathers.

This scene, like the Sacral-Idyllic landscapes, has a pastoral setting:

> corniger Arcadii vacuam pastoris in aulam
> dux aries saturas ipse reduxit oves. (39-40)

The horned bellwether himself brought home the full-fed ewes to the empty fold of the Arcadian shepherd.

It is the nostalgia of an urban poet for the countryside: like the landscapes discussed above, the essence of a dream.

The reader catches glimpse of such an ideal countryside in several other poems. In I-18 the poet places the urban narrator/male lover in a lonely country grove as he laments Cynthia's disdain and carves her name on trees:

> haec certe deserta loca et taciturna querenti,
> et vacuum Zephyri possidet aura nemus. (1-2)

Here surely is a deserted spot for my weeping, and Zephyr's breezes possess the empty grove.

As in the Sacral-Idyllic landscapes, the scenery against which the narrator/male-lover's figure is placed consists of trees and rocks:

> vos eritis testes si quos habet arbor amores,
> fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo. (19-20)
>
> pro quo continui montes et frigida rupes
> et datur inculto ramite dura quies. (27-28)

You will be my witnesses--if trees can know love--beech, and pine, beloved by the god of Arcady.

For this I am granted endless mountains, cold rocks, and harsh repose on a wild path.

It is not unlikely that Propertius had one of these idealized landscapes in mind when he wrote these lines.

Poem I-19 also seems to stem from a similar source. It sets forth a fantasy of innocent and tranquil love in the countryside, with the sophisticated Cynthia and the narrator/male lover transported to rural bliss:

> illic assidue tauros spectabis arantis
> et vitem docta falce ponere comas;
> atque ibi rara feres inculto tura sacello
> haedus ubi agrestis corruet ante focos. (11-14)

There you will repeatedly watch the oxen ploughing, and the vine laying aside its tresses at the skillful touch of the sickle. And there you will sometimes bring incense to a rude

shrine, wher a kid will fall on the rustic altar.

The picture is hardly serious; the vision of the urban sophisticates entranced by ploughing oxen elicits a smile, as does the image of the narrator/male lover hunting wild beasts (incipiam captare feras, 19). The poem contains a joke; its point is that in the countryside no rival is likely to seduce Cynthia. But the rustic vision has nonetheless the same delicate unreality as the Sacral-Idyllic landscapes.

Finally, a less rustic tableau, but one that can nevertheless be linked with these landscapes, is embedded within III-3, which Propertius has cast in the form of a dream. The poet envisions himself on Mt. Helicon, addressed by Phoebus Apollo. The poem is in essence an elegant and clever *recusatio*; Apollo himself forbids the poet to write epic, and makes it clear that love poetry is his forte instead. The poet is then directed by the god to the abode of the Muses, which is described thus:

> hic erat affixis viridis spelunca lapillis,
> pendebantque cavis tympana pumicibus
> orgia Musarum et Sileni patris imago,
> fictilis et calami Pan Tegeae tui. (27-30)

Here was a cavern, decorated with greenish stones, and timbrels, objects sacred to the Muses, hung from the hollow pumice, and a clay image of you, Father Silenus.

Though this is not a bucolic landscape, the description of the Muses' abode suggests the shrines and cult images of the Sacral-Idyllic landscapes. Moreover, the greenness of the cave evokes the eerie and shimmering lighting that at times occurs in the dream-like imaginary landscapes.

That Propertius was at times inspired by, or at least affected by, the paintings of the Sacral-Idyllic genre remains, of course, conjectural, but seems plausible. But the relationship between his poetry and the painter's art seems to go well beyond the mere choice of bucolic subject matter. In the next section of this chapter I will proceed to argue that Propertius' poetry and Campanian painting derive from a single contemporary aesthetic, and that there are demonstrable links between his literary art and the Second and Third Painting Styles. That such a linkage has not hitherto been studied is probably the result of the old and traditional separation of visual and literary art within the discipline of Classics, a field relatively slow to change.[58] In order to clarify this relationship of poetry to painting, we will proceed to examine the salient characteristics of the Second and Third Painting Styles.

The Second Style.

To understand the veritable artistic revolution that took place with the advent of the Second Style, one should briefly recall that First Style decoration consisted in making a wall appear as if it were constructed of polychrome marble blocks,[59] and it is with the Second Style that figural representations appeared in wall decoration. This seems a natural evolution in taste; what is remarkable, however, is

that artists working in the Second Style were not merely content to cover walls with figurative designs, but were also evidently interested in creating the illusion of space beyond the walls which they were decorating. Perhaps this style has its inception in the purely pragmatic effort to make small and poorly-lit rooms appear larger and airier; but the efforts of the best artists working in this style are no less than works of genius. Not only do they suggest space beyond the wall; the thoughtful viewver is invited to catch a glimpse of a mysterious other-world being created which seems to exist beyond the confines of the flat walls of a room.

In order to clarify the effect on the viewer of this illusionistic play with space, we will examine one of the most remarkable examples of Second Style painting, the great Dionysiac frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries near Pompeii. This frieze dates roughly to the early Augustan era, and thus is in fact contemporary to Propertius' poetic career.

Much contradictory material has been written about the meaning and religious significance of the frieze, an issue beyond the scope of this chapter.[60] The artistic skill of its creator or creators is, however, undeniable. The frieze spans the whole wall space of the four walls of the room in which it is located, interrupted only by two doors and a window. Its subject-matter evidently pertains to Dionysus: the God himself reclines on the lap of Ariadne, whose upper body has unfortunately been obliterated. Among the twenty-

nine figures represented on the frieze there appear sileni, satyrs, and women who may be maenads (thyrsi are shown in the painting), as well as a goat, all associated with the cult of the God. There is also a winged figure, reminiscent of Etruscan tomb paintings;[61] its significance or connection with the cult is unclear. Among the mythological figures there appear depictions of women who appear to be participating in some sort of rite; it is generally agreed that the frieze shows an initiation ceremony connected with the Dionysiac cult. What, however, the meaning of the ceremony is, can only remain conjectural.

The illusion of a mysterious alternate world beyond the confines of the room stems from several factors in the painting. The figures in the frieze, executed with great skill, are nearly life-sized; one has the startling sensation of looking at real human beings upon entering the room. The dado above which the figures have been placed seems to be surmounted by a narrow greenish floor upon which they move; the painter has separated the figures by vertical black and green pilasters which seem to be holding up a frieze. The illusion created is that of another red room, surrounded by a colonnade, beyond the actual room in the villa; the viewer seems to have a glimpse of a space beyond the walls.

But while the artist has achieved the illusion of a such a reality beyond the wall, the viewer also realizes that the world which the artist has created is one of pure fantasy: it

is inhabited both by human beings--the women participating in the Dionysiac rite--and by mythical beings--Dionysus and the figures associated with the god's cult. They intermingle in the frieze as if they belonged to one single realm of being. Thus a strange new world has been created by the artist, a dealer in illusions.

The Dionysiac frieze of the Villa of the Mysteries is a work of genius. It represents the Second Style at its best; yet all other Second Style paintings share with it, to a greater or lesser degree, the desire to suggest an alternate world beyond the confines of the wall--to give the viewver a glimpse into a reality that never existed. It is this quality which Second Style paintings share with Propertius' poetry since he, too, creates an alternate world of illusion, as will be shown later.

The Third Style.

Like the Second Style, The Third Style can also be linked, though more tenuously, with Propertius' art. Like any new artistic development, it represents, to some degree, a rejection of its predecessor. While Second Style paintings offer the viewer glimpses into and illusionist world of fantasy, they do so by naturalistic means. Human and animal figures are not distorted; architectural vistas, however fanciful, are recognizable as such, even if they represent no

real city on earth.[62] The Third Style, on the other hand, rejects the suggestion of reality altogether, and aggressively moves into the realm of pure fantasy. It is dificult, at first sight, to recognize objects for what they are. What appear to be delicate reeds separating areas of flat and rich color are actualy ultra-thin temple columns; the frieze above them seems at first to be no more than an embroidered ribbon. Tiny landscapes or decorative motifs appear to float in thin air; candelabra-like objects branch into leaves and blooms; faces emerge from the calyxes of flowers.[63]

In the Third Style, the creation of illusory space, with which the Second Style painters experimented, is rejected entirely. As Maiuri points out,[64] the walls become "blind" and self-contained. The ornamental effect at which this style aims partakes so much of the purely fanciful that one is led to wonder whether the Third Style paintings were meant to serve as a deliberate affront to more conservative artistic tastes. One suspects that the Augustan architect and engineer Vitruvius' disgust with such decorative efforts represents the reaction of more than one member of the Roman (and possibly Campanian) intelligentsia to the wholesale rejection of realistic representation in the Third Style. In Vitruvius' eyes, the new style almost smacks of moral decay; he fulminates thus:[65]

Nam pinguntur tectoriis monstra potius quam ex rebus finitis imagines certae: pro columnis enim struuntur calami striati, pro fastigiis appagineculi cum crispis foliis et volutis, item candelabra aedicularum sustinentia figuras,

supra fatigia eorum surgentes ex radicibus cum volutis teneri plures habentes in se sine ratione sedentia sigilla, non minus coliculi dimidiata habentes sigilla alia humanis, alia bestiarum capitibus.

Haec autem ne sunt nec fieri possunt nec fuerunt...At haec falsa videntes homines non reprehendunt sed delectantur, neque animadvertunt, si qui eorum fieri potest necne.

For in houses they paint monstrosities rather than definite images based on real things. Indeed, in place of columns they paint striated reeds; in place of gables, panels with curly leaves and volutes, as well as candelabra holding up images of shrines; and from their roofs rise more delicate stems with volutes, without any reason, holding placed within them, no less, small statuettes: some with the heads of men, some of beasts. Such things, however do not exist, cannot be made, and have never existed....But seeing these false things, people do not condemn them, but are delighted; and they do not consider whether such things can exist or not.

In short, the Third Style rejects any pretense of setting down reality; it is decoration based solely on fantastic elements. This characteristic also links it to the art of Propertius, as his poetry at times disassociates itself from the real and creates a realm as fantastic as these paintings.

In summary, then Propertius' poetry is linked to the Second Style when it offers the reader glimpses into an alternate reality; it is linked the Third Style when it creates a reality from the purely fantastic. The next part of this chapter will examine this double linkage.

Propertius and the Second And Third Styles.

To demonstrate a connection between poetry and painting styles is a delicate task; yet there are enough indications in Propertius' work of such a connection to justify the attempt.

The fictive world which the poet creates--seemingly set in the Bohemian milieu of Rome--is as illusory as the fictive world of alternate reality which one glimpses in paintings of the Second Style. It is, above all, the ground-breaking work of P. Veyne[66], which enables the reader of Propertius to see this. While Veyne discusses the world of the Roman elegists in general, he seems particularly interested in Propertius, and devotes a great part of his work to Propertius' universe.

What Veyne emphasizes is the utter unreality of the seemingly real milieu of the Roman demi-monde that Propertius creates in his work, a world peopled by young men-about-town, such as his narrator/male lover, and the mistresses with whom they associate. Veyne argues that it is a pure fantasy, a world of illusion: the fictional background against which his narrator can posture as he devotes himself exclusively to love and poetry. As Veyne points out:[67]

> The internal logic of this world, which is not our world, is that one lives in it only to sing of and suffer from love....Elegy seems to take as its theater the streets of Rome, Tivoli, the small port cities of Latium or the Neapolitan coast, but in reality it takes place outside the world, just like bucolic poetry.

In other words, the elegists, Propertius among them, create an alternate world of the imagination beyond the real world of Rome, just as the Second Style painters create an alternate world of the imagination beyond the confines of a solid wall.

To create this alternate world, Propertius often uses the technique of inserting an unexpected visual image into a poem which seems to be about something else. The image is

minimally related to the poem; thus the reader, as it were, briefly catches a glimpse of another reality, as he would if he were looking at a Second Style painting. Poem I-17, for example is set on a lonely shore; the shipwrecked narrator contemplates his imminent death. Suddenly, however, one is given an unexpected vision of dancing nereids, a glimpse into the magic world of myth:

> at vos aequorae formosae Doride natae,
> candida felici solvite vela choro. (25-26)

But you, sea-daughters of beautiful Doris, unfurl my white sails in your happy dance.

Such brief scenes can also appear in poems which are set in the thick of urban society. In II-16, for example, the narrator reproaches Cynthia for her greed, since her current favorite is a wealthy praetor from Illyria instead of the narrator/male lover. Suddenly we glimpse an exotic slave market:

> barbarus exutis agitat vestigia lumbis
> et subito felix nunc mea regna tenet. (27-28)

A barbarian is jumping about with naked loins; and suddenly the fortunate man posseses my kingdom.

There are numerous such unexpected brief glimpses of another reality; one that deserves special mention is that contained in the macabre closing verses of IV-7. Cynthia's querulous ghost has just given the narrator/male lover practical directions concerning the disposal of her servants and the erection of her tomb; the final verses, however shock the reader with the horrific and vivid visual image of two

copulating skeletons:

> nunc te possident aliae; mox sola tenebo;
> mecum eris, et mixtis ossibus ossa teram. (93-94)

Now other women possess you; soon I alone will hold you. You will be with me; and I will grind down your bones when our bones are mingled.

A true alternate reality: a glimpse within the other-world of a grave.

It is also Propertius' use of mythology which links him with Second Style Painting. By and large, it represents a problem for the modern reader. Propertius' use of mythological *exempla*, may well have been a source of pleasure for his contemporaries as a kind of literary game for *cognoscenti*. For present-day taste, his allusions to mythology often seem so excessive that they detract from the enjoyment of his poetry. Even Sullivan, who believes that generally Propertius' mythological allusions function as successful ornamentation, admits that at times they amount to "an unselective padding" which adds nothing to a poem's internal logic.[68]

But when the mythical allusions are used in moderation, the poetry, curiously, has the same mysterious effect as the great frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries. There, as has been noted earlier, human beings and mythical beings intermingle to create a new magic reality, despite the fact that the viewer knows he is looking only at a painted wall. Just so, at times Propertius' poetry creates a magic reality, where the denizens of Rome's sophisticated demi-monde seem to

intermingle with creatures from the realm of myth. The reader knows, furthermore, that Propertius' Rome itself is an illusion, not the real Rome.

Propertius is most successful in creating this magic reality when he brings in unexpected images drawn from myth, rather than when he piles up mythical details. In II-13, Cynthia is depicted, on a mundane level, by her narrator/lover as a woman who likes to drink and to dance: posito formose saltat Iaccho (she dances bautifully when the wine has been set out, 13). But immediately the image of a Roman banquet is juxtaposed with the image of a bacchanal procession: egit ut euhantis dux Ariadna choros (18); just as Ariadne led the ululating chruses. The two images merge, with the result that the reader sees a strange but atractive banquet where mythological beings commingle with young Roman sophisticates. The concluding lines of the poem further sharpen the picture of this unreal world: Jupiter himself becomes one of Cynthia's sexual conquests:

> néc semper nobiscum humana cubilia vises,
> Romana accumbes prima puella Iovi. (31-32)

Nor will you always seek out the beds of men; you will be the first Roman girl to sleep with Jove.

The premise of II-16 is that the narrator/male lover has been summoned (for an unknown reason) to the house of his mistress in Tibur; in real terms, a dangerous and foolhardy undertaking in the crowded metropolis of Rome. The point of the poem is that the power of love will protect the lover even

in the most dangerous situations. The narrator sets out alone; suddenly he is accompanied by Venus herself, as well as her son Cupid who lights their way:

> sanguine tam parvo quis enim spargitur amantis
> improbus, et cuius sit comes ipsa Venus.
> Luna ministrat iter demonstrant astra salebras,
> ipse Amor accensas praecutit ante faces;
> saeva canum rabies morsus avertit hiantis. (13-16)

Indeed, what wicked man would be sprinkled with the scanty blood of a lover, whose companion is Venus herself? The moon watches his way, the stars show the rough ground. Cupid himself brandishes lighted torches, and fierce dogs turn aside their gaping jaws.

There are also elements in Propertius' work which partake of the experimental aesthetic of the Third Style. As it has been indicated earlier, this style explores the realm of visual fantasy. The appearance of objects drawn from the real world is distorted, and their proportions diminished or elongated. Strange and surprising visual elements, such as those deplored by Vitruvius, can appear in unusual contexts. Occasionally such elements crop up in Propertius' poetry; one of them is the unexpected diminution, for no apparent reason, of objects to tiny toy-like things.

Such a diminution takes place, for example, in I-11, wherein the narrator/lover laments his Cynthia's absence from Rome. She is enjoying herself with a rival lover at the resort of Baiae (corruptas Baias 27, as the narrator puts it). He expresses the wish that, instead enjoying herself in bed, Cynthia would be involved in physical exercise appropriate to a sea-side resort, rowing and swimming. This is where a

physical reduction of his mistress takes place, quite unexpected in the context:

> atque utinam mage te remis confisa minutis
> parvula Lucrina cumba moretur aqua
> aut teneat clausam tenui Teuthrantis in unda
> alternae facilis cedere lympha manu. (9-12)

I would rather that a tiny little skiff held you, endowed with tiny oars, on the Lucrine lake; or had you, surrounded by the little waves of Teuthras, parting the waters easily with both your hands.

The woman, the boat and the oars are miniaturized; even the water is reduced to *tenui...unda*. The adjective *tenui* even seems to reduce the depth of the water. The background of the scene seems to become flat; the tiny boat floats in a space with no depth or background. The effect is precisely like that of Third Style paintings, with their flat fields of color.

The effect of reducing Cynthia to a toy-like figure is, no doubt, intentionally comic in this poem. Usually, however, Propertius' technique of diminution is associated with death and funerals; its effect in such cases is more ambiguous. The narrator's reduction of himself to a little name on a thin slab of marble (et breve in exiguo marmore nomen ero, II-1, 72) is odd but not implausible--a self-disclaimer, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, by a poet who claims that his only subject is a woman named Cynthia.

Poem II-13 is a serious and lengthy contemplation on the narrator's part of his own mortality; here the same self-reduction is more surprising than in the previous poem:

deinde ubi suppositus cinerem me fecerit ardor
accipiat Manes parvula testa meos,
et sit in exiguo laurus super addita busto
quae tegat extincti funeris umbra locum,
et duo sint versus; qui nunc iacet horrida pulvis
unius hic quondam servus amoris erat. (31-36)

Then, once the fire placed under me has turned me to ashes, let a tiny urn receive my spirit; and let a laurel be planted on the little tomb, the place which the shade of my dead body will reach; and let there be two lines of verse: he, who now lies there as horrid dust, once was the slave of a single love.

The miniaturization appears somewhat incongruous here, since a tension between the subject matter of the passage--death--and the trivializing mode of its presentation is created. The effect is unexpected, even bizarre. It is made even more so by the narrator's description of his now dead self as "ossa minuta" in the last line of the poem. The adjective "minuta" may well mean "diminished, attenuated"; on the other hand, it may simply mean "small, trifling"; no doubt the poet is playing with both levels of meaning. Is there, then, a tiny skeleton lurking about the tiny tomb, despite the crematory fires? The reader sees a strange little scene, darkly comic in its effect, a miniature grave planted with trees, floating against an indeterminate, probably black: an attenuated *memento mori*.

These miniaturizations are not unlike the strange attenuations and distortions of objects typical of the Third Style. There is, however, another characteristic of Propertius' poetry, admittedly harder to pin down, which reflects this style: the use of unusual fantastic images in

unexpected contexts, not unlike the bizarre collocations of disparate objects from the natural world that Vitruvius decries. In Propertius' poetry, these fantastic images are nearly always connected with death, and at their best are unforgettable. Such is the brief glimpse of the ghost of Protesilaus in I-19, who has come back from the underworld to visit his living bride Laodamia for one last time; he desires to touch her one last time with his "falsis...palmis", an almost untranslatable phrase. To render it as "feigned palms" would be to do gross injustice to the originality and poetic power of the visual image which Propertius has created, a surreal and disturbing one.

At times these unexpected brief and fantastic images are truly macabre. Thus in III-7, the disturbingly graphic description of Paetus' death at sea (briefly discussed earlier in the chapter), the young man, yet living, is transformed by the poet into "nova longinquis piscibus esca" (8): strange new bait for far-away fishes: another fantastic, even surreal image. Even stranger is the vision conveyed in the brief poem I-21, which closes Book I. A soldier named Gallus is addressing another soldier, wounded and fleeing. The visual presentation of the two figures, however is ambiguous. The image of the fleeing soldier on which the poet focuses is a bizarre one; all that the reader sees of him are his swollen, or bulging eyes: turgentia lumina (3): a suggestion of sheer terror. It is also unclear whether Gallus is dying, or

already dead:

> et quaecumque super dispersa invenerit ossa
> montibus Etruscis, haec sciat esse mea. (9-10)

And whosoever finds bones scattered over the mountains of Etruria, let him know that they are mine.

Quite possibly it is a skeleton--a heap of bones addressing the terrified soldier; the ambiguous image conveyed to the reader is in any case vivid and disturbing.

In this context it is impossible not to mention once more the visual presentation of Cynthia's ghost in IV-7. The few details which Propertius chooses to describe its physical presence create an unforgettable vision from the realm of dark fantasy: the dress scorched on her flank (lateri vestis adusta fuit, 8), the beryl ring on her finger (9), the face transmogrified by the waters of Lethe (10), and the rattling skeleton fingers (at illi pollicibus fragiles increpuere manus, 12). She is a woman and yet not a woman; a fantastic creation from another world, come to visit reality. Thus, while Propertius uses, like the painters of the Third Style, images drawn from the realm of fantasy, they tend to belong to the realm of the macabre and the sinister, unlike the pure and morally neutral fantasies of the Third Style.

Thus, while it is, of course, difficult, if not nearly impossible, to establish a direct equation between visual and poetic art, it can be said, on the basis of the evidence presented in the latter part of this chapter, that there is an aesthetic relationship between Propertius' poetry and both the

Second and Third Styles of painting. As it has been indicated earlier, the two styles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather represent artistic trends and developments, which at times may overlap. This kind of overlapping seems, in fact, to take place in the work of Propertius, since, as I have tried to show, elements of both styles can be linked to his verbal art. Poetry and painting, then, can partake of a common aesthetic; and it appears that the work of Propertius, a highly visual poet, clearly demonstrates this.

1. See the concise summary of Propertius' manuscript tradition in M. Hubbard, *Propertius* (London, 1974), p. 3-4.

2. II-13, 25-26. Sat mea sic magna est, si tres sint pompa libelli/quos ego Persephonae magna dona feram.

My funeral will thus be grand enough, if there will be three little books to bring to Persephone as my greatest gifts.

3. Notably the work of Baehrens (1880), Postgate (1894) and Enk (1911), and, more recently, the work of Butler and Barber (1969).

4. See Chapter 9 in J.P. Boucher, *Études sur Properce: Problèmes d'Inspiration et d'Art* (Paris, 1965), 269-332.

5. As G. Luck asks, with reason: "Should one attribute the many obscure passages in this author to 'poetic licence' or to the corrupt manuscript tradition?" Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London, 1959), p. 120-121.

6. Margaret Hubbard, *Propertius* (London, 1974).

7. Theodore Papanghelis, *Propertius: a Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge, 1987).

8. Hans-Peter Stahl, *"Love" and "War" in Propertius. Individual and State under Augustus*(Berkeley, 1983).

9. Thomas Benediktson, *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity* (Carbondale, Ill., 1989).

10. I use J. P. Sullivan's term in describing Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. For a highly readable account of the furor caused in the classical establishment by Pound's reworking of Propertius, see J.P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius* (Austin, 1964).

11. Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* should be read by every student of Propertius, as it suggests facets of the poet's humor and self-deprecating irony which are at times hard to see in his original work because of the textual problems.

12. For a concise summary of the internal evidence which allows the dating of the books, see G.P. Goold, *Propertius. Elegies* (Cambridge, 1990), 1-3.

13. Of the twenty-two poems in Book I, only the last three do not directly or indirectly pertain to Cynthia.

14. In III-1, the calling of a poet; in III-7, the loss at sea of a young merchant Paetus; in III-9, praise of Maecenas; in III-22, praise of Italy.

15. A prime example of this biographical approach is Saara Lilja's study *The Roman Elegists' Attitude Towards Women* (New York and London, 1978). For her, the works of the Roman love elegists represent direct accounts of the personal amatory experiences of the poets.

16. The exception is Sulpicia, whose poems are embedded in the collection of Tibullus' poetry. Her *ego* is, of course, female; but there is no reason suppose that her female narrator equals the historical Sulpicia, as the forty-odd verses that survive seem to follow the same elegiac conventions as the work of the male poets.

17. Thus, for example, Boucher devotes his entire last chapter to creating a biography of Cynthia. Butler and Barber firmly believe in the existence of a prolonged love-affair between the poet Propertius and the woman Cynthia: "She was a light'o love, he a youth of moderate means and decent birth. He loved her passionately and and believed her love returned." Butler and Barber, p. 11.

18. Apuleius, *Apologia* 10, A.D. 158.

19. See, for example, Boucher, Ch. IX. He argues, against Butler and Barber, that Hostia must have come from a cultivated background, and therefore must have been Hostius' descendant.

20. This conjecture is based on IV-7, wherein Cynthia appears as a revenant come to haunt the male lover/narrator. In the following poem, IV-8, however, Cynthia is very much alive.

21. Maria Wyke, "Propertius' *Scripta Puella*," *Journal ofRoman Studies* 77 (1987). p. 47-61.

22. Julien Benda, *Properce ou les Amants du Tibur* (Paris, 1928).

23. Benda, p. 117.

24. G.P. Goold, ed. and trans., *Propertius. Elegies* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 9.

25. See Robert F. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology* (Denver, 1991), p. 146.

26. For a brief summary of the attributes of Artemis/Diana, see Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical ythology*, 5th. ed. White Plains, N. Y., 1994, p. 157-168 and p. 529-530.

27. The body of the well-known statue of Artemis from Ephesus is entirely covered by multiple breasts.

28. In the *Odyssey* XI, 196-199, the ghost of Odysseus' mother, Antikleia, refers to this as the manner of her death.

29. Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology. A Biographical Dictionary* (Denver, 1991), p. 71.

30. Martha Ann and Dorothy Myers Imel, *Goddesses in World Mythology* (Santa Barbara, 1993), p. 168.

31. See the discussion in Chapter 2 in Amedeo Maiuri, *Roman Wall Painting* (Geneva, 1953).

32. Pliny, *Letters*, VI, 16.

33. For a useful account of the history of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the eruption of the volcano, and the excavations in Campania, see Richard Brilliant, *Pompeii A.D. 79. The Treasure of Rediscovery* (NewYork, 1979), and Marcel Brion, *Pompeii and Herculaneum. The Glory and the Grief* (London, 1960).

34. See Pliny, *ibid.*

35. Even today it is unclear how large Herculaneum, upon which the modern town of Resina is built, actually is.

36. A brief but succinct summary of Mau's Four Styles is to be found in Susan Woodford, *Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 97-102.

37. Maiuri, p. 58.

38. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 39.

39. See the discussion in Maiuri, chapter 5.

40. *Ibid*, p. 43.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

42. Hubbard, p. 82.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

44. For an easily accessible and thorough introduction to Campanian erotic art, see Jean Marcadé, *Roma Amor. Essay on Erotic Elements in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Geneva, 1965).

45. Hubbard, p. 167.

46. See, for example, Woodford, p. 95, for two copies of a painting of Perseus and Andromeda, executed by different hands.

47. Depicted in Curtius, p. 124-127, and p. 141-143.

48. See Chapter 2, "La Sensibilité de Properce: Tempérament Visuel," p. 41-64.

49. Hubbard, p. 54.

50. See Maiuri, p. 134-136 for examples of still life; p. 124-125 for gardens; p. 111 and 129 for Nilotic scenes.

51. See, for example the Tomb of the Bulls, where, in a scene depicting Achilles and Troilus, the trees are stylized decorative motifs, in contrast to the relatively realistic depiction of the human figures. In Amedeo Maiuri and Lionello Venturi, *Painting in Italy from the Origins to the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1959), p. 34.

52. See, for example, the depiction of *Pan and Nymphs,* or *Cupid Weeping* in Maiuri, p. 118-119.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 33 and Woodford, p. 73.

54. Reproduced in Gerard Gassiot-Talabot, *Roman and Palaeo-Chiristian Painting* (Geneva, 1966), p. 51.

55. *Ibid*, p. 47.

56. Maiuri, p. 122.

57. Maiuri, p. 120.

58. Eleanor Winsor Leach, however, deals with the relationship of Campanian landscape painting and Roman poetry in *The Rhetoric of Space* (Princeton, 1988. She concentrates on the work of Virgil.

59. See, for example, a wall in the Samnite House, Herculaneum, reproduced in Maiuri, p. 39.

60. See, for example, Maiuri's interpretation, p. 50-63. An entirely new perspective on the painting was given me by a former student,, Deborah Barrett, a practicing Jungian

therapist. She interprets the painting as a meditation on the various stages of a woman's life.

61. See, for example, the winged figure on one of the terra cotta slabs from Caere, reproduced in Massimo Pallatino, *Etruscan Painting* (New York, 1952), p. 34.

62. See, for example, Woodford, p. 73; Curtius, p. 103; Schefold, *Vergessenes Pompeji*, p. 49.

63. See, for example, Maiuri, p. 44; Curtius, p. 54 and p. 407.

64. Maiuri, p. 43.

65. Vitruvius, VII, 5, 23-24, 3-4.

66. P. Veyne, *L'Élegie Érotique Romaine*; see Bibliography.

67. Veyne, p. 101.

68. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius*, p. 44.

CHAPTER 4: THE THEATRE OF LOVE

> One element in the creation of the world of Augustan poetry, part realistic and part fantasy, has received little attention from scholars, and that is the drama.
>
> Jasper Griffin

Life and Theatre in Ovid.

While Propertius is a difficult poet, as I have indicated in the previous chapter, Ovid is surely one of the best known surviving Roman authors, read and enjoyed, whether in the original or in translation, by scholar and layman alike. His popularity is hardly surprising; Ovid's poetry is accessible, urbane, and amusing, and can be a source of genuine pleasure. J.H. Mozley's appreciative assessment of Ovid's poetry is worth citing; he speaks of the poet's "studied artlessness...considerable degree of humour...cool flippancy and irresistible wit."[1] These qualities indeed abound in the three works--all pertaining to *amor*, to be discussed in this chapter: the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris*.

A casual reading of these three urbane and sophisticated works, written with elegance and charm, cannot fail to delight all but the most humorless and stiffly moralistic reader as Ovid lays bare the erotic entanglements of men and women in a Roman setting. Ovid's worldly eye is amused; the poems are amusing; their tone is witty. A closer examination of these poems, however, reveals a darker current

beneath the glittering surface. It becomes clear that Ovid's work is not far removed from the pessimistic vision of love and the relationships between men and women which manifests itself in the poetry of Lucretius, Catullus and Propertius, discussed in the previous three chapters. Chapter 4 will be an attempt to demonstrate that in Ovid's three poems about *amor* there is an absence of love. In them *Amor* is not love, but rather a game of sex refined to performance art and set against a Roman backdrop.

Molly Myerowitz has suggested in her study of the *Ars Amatoria*[2] that Ovid envisions love as one of the games that is played within any civilized society. In this chapter I argue, rather, that for Ovid *amor* is a theatrical performance; it is the appearance of love, not love itself, that is all important. Before examining the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris* as theatre art, in the first part of this chapter I will discuss the importance of theatre in contemporary visual art, based on evidence from Campanian wall painting.

As it has been pointed out in the previous chapter, there is a relative scarcity of wall paintings from Rome itself, but it can be assumed that the visual evidence from the area around Vesuvius partakes of the same aesthetic as Roman wall painting, probably with some minor lag in time; and the extant wall paintings from Campania suggest a fascination with all aspects of theatrical art. Themes and motifs based on theatre

often appear in house decorations; furthermore, the unusual manner of depicting stage settings, as it will be argued in this chapter, suggests that life itself may well have been conceived of as a stage performance.

It is not surprising, then, that Ovid's work, too, should smack of theatricality. In the latter part of this chapter the *Amores* and the *Remedia* will be read as scenes in a play, Ovid's Theatre of Love. It will also be shown that the *Ars Amatoria*, the didactic counterpart of the *Amores*, lays such stress on appearance in the conduct of *amor* that it too relates to Ovid's Theatre of Love: it can be read as an erotic comedy or farce, played by multiple unnamed actors on the constantly shifting stage that represents Rome.

Theatre in the Visual Art of Campania

That the perception of man's life as a play acted out on the stage of the world was not unfamiliar to Ovid's contemporaries is suggested by Suetonius' (c. 185-129 A.D.) description of the Emperor Augustus' last moments:

> Supremo die, identidem exquirens, an iam de se tumultus foris esset, petito speculo, capillum comi ac malas labantes corrigi praecepit et, admissos amicos percontatus, ecquid iis videretur minimum vitas commode transegisse, adiecit et clausulam: ἐπεὶ δὲ πανὺ καλῶς πέπαιςται, δότε κρότον, καὶ πάντες ημᾶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμπσατε.[3]

> On his last day, asking repeatedly whether there already was an outcry about him outside, he took a mirror, and ordered that his hair be combed and his slack jaws straightened. And having admitted his friends, he asked them whether he had acted out the mime of his life well; and he added this tag:

Since I have indeed acted well, give me applause, and may all send me forth with cheers.

The story may, of course, be a fiction invented either by Suetonius or by one of his informants. Furthermore, Suetonius writes at some years distance from the death of Augustus, and may reflect the mentality of his own time more than that of Augustus--and Ovid. Yet the visual evidence of Campanian painting, also suggests that the perception of life as theatre may well have been widespread during Ovid's lifetime (43 B.C.-18 A.D.).

Theatrical art seems to have appealed to both upper-class Romans and the plebs alike at least from the early days of the Republic onward. That a talented playwright of no rank could be accepted as a member of the most aristocratic and cultivated circles in Rome seems to indicate the high esteem in which good theatrical art was held as early as the second century B.C. by the élite of Rome. One need only recall the case of Terentius Afer (ca. 195 or 185-159 B.C.), better known to posterity as Terence; originally probably a slave, he was taken up by the aristocratic and intellectual circle of Scipio Aemilianus. On the other hand, plays were also a source of entertainment for the masses, performed on public holidays such as the Megalensia.[4] By Ovid's time, theatres were popular meeting places in Rome, to judge by what the poet himself says in the *Ars Amatoria*; he recommends the "round theatres" (curvis theatris, I, 89) as good places for a young man about town to meet girls:

sed tu praecipue curvis venare theatris;
haec loca sunt voto fertiliora tuo.
illic invenies quod ames quod ludere possis,
quodque semel tangas, quodque tenere velis. (I, 89-92)

sic ruit in celebres cultissima femina ludos;
copia iudicium saepe morata meum est. (I, 97-98)

But hunt forthwith in the round theatres; these places are quite fruitful for what you desire. There you will find what you might love, or what you might play with; what you might touch but once, or what you might want to hold onto.

Thus the most cultivated women rush to the crowded performances; their abundance has often made my judgment falter.

Theatrical Motifs in Campanian Painting.

That theatre, however, was not only a popular form of entertainment in Ovid's day, but, more than that, an integral part of contemporary artistic consciousness, is suggested by the fact that decorative motifs connected with the theatre are very widespread in the visual art that has survived from this period. The evidence for this must, once more, be gleaned from Campania rather than Rome itself. Once again, a brief disclaimer (see Chapter 3) must be made before discussing this art. Rome does not equal Campania; however, artistic trends in Rome must have influenced those in the provincial towns of Campania. Furthermore, Campania, a part of Magna Graecia, may well have been more directly affected by Greek artistic and theatrical traditions than a cosmopolitan center such as Rome; nonetheless, allowing for these differences, is likely that what can be said about Campanian visual art and theatre also

holds true for Rome, perhaps with only minor differences. Themes derived from the theatre may at some point have been equally prevalent in wall painting at Rome.

Various aspects of theatre are depicted in Campanian wall painting.[5] First, numerous wall paintings show scenes being acted on the stage; these are easily identified as such, since the personages depicted therein wear or hold theatrical masks. It is, however, impossible to say whether such wall paintings are meant to be representations of specific scenes in actual plays, or whether they are merely products of an artist's imagination. In one such painting,[6] three figures, one male, two female, are represented against a flat white background, with the merest suggestion of the shadows cast by the figures. No stage scenery or backdrop is indicated. That this is probably a scene from a comedy or farce is suggested by the grotesque mask and the general appearance of the male, who is paunchy and barefoot, and wears a plain tunic. He seems to be a slave, or, in any case, a member of the lower classes. One of the two women wears a white mask, and is more richly dressed than the other, whose mask is brownish. They seem to represent mistress and servant or nurse.

A mosaic signed by Dioskourides of Samos (National Museum, Naples)[7] shows a music and dance performance, possibly an interlude in a play. A woman in a white mask is playing the *aula* or double flute. Two males, also masked, are caught in the movement of dance, one holding castanets, the other

striking a large tambourine. A small figure, barefoot and dressed in a plain brown tunic, is standing by, not directly involved in the action. He may either be a child--a street urchin or merely poor, to judge by his mean and simple garb--or, as A. Maiuri believes,[8] a dwarf; he may be a member of the troupe. While the artist's suggestion of a high door or gate on the far right of the mosaic may represent stage scenery, it is, however, possible that the action is taking place outdoors. The mosaic may represent a band of street-performers rather than actors on a conventional stage.

At times Campanian paintings give their viewer glimpses of theatrical life behind the scenes. A painting from Herculaneum (National Museum, Naples) depicts a seated male figure wearing a white robe belted in gold.[9] He holds a sceptre in his right hand, and loosely clasps the hilt of a sword with his left. The fact that his hair appears somewhat disheveled suggests that he has just removed his mask at the end of a performance. It is possible that this is a portrait of an actor admired by the owner of the painting; it may even have been commissioned by the actor himself. His face seems individualized rather than merely conventionally handsome. That he is a tragic actor is indicated by the female figure on the right of the painting who is writing an inscription below a large tragic mask, behind which stands another male figure, seemingly an attendant. Another painting in the same vein (somewhat damaged) shows a seated male figure, loosely draped,

contemplating a tragic mask held by a standing male figure.[10] While Curtius, who reproduces the painting, believes that this figure represents a tragic poet, it is also possible that this is another portrait of a successful tragic actor.

What seem to be pre-performance preparations are depicted in the emblema of a mosaic from the house of the Tragic Poet.[11] The occasion seems to be a satyr play, since the two young men on the left of the picture are shown barefoot and wearing nothing but shaggy fur loincloths, likely costumes for satyrs. One of them has a mask on his head, not yet pushed down over his face. In the center of the painting is a musician who plays the double flute. One of the actors, his arms up, is shown in the act of pulling on his stage costume, assisted by an attendant. An older, bearded man is seated near the center of the painting; he may be the leader of the troupe, or author of the play about to be performed. This mosaic seems to be a realistic and closely observed representation of scenes in the life of stage performers. Indeed, all the depictions mentioned above, even the idealized portraits of actors, probably give a fairly accurate insight into the theatrical life of the late Republic and early Empire.

Fantastic Stages in Campanian Painting.

The fact that numerous wall and floor decorations in

private dwellings represent scenes related to theatre seems to indicate that stage performances must have been a source of interest and pleasure for many members of the public. Beyond this, however, the very idea of theatre, in a broader sense, seems to pervade Campanian visual art. A number of paintings seem to depict stage settings, yet they belong to a theatre of the fantasy--a theatre that never was--and say more about the relationship of illusion and reality that they do about the physical stage.

One such remarkable painting from Herculaneum [12] looks, to a modern eye, like a high baroque artist's maquette for a theatrical or operatic setting. That this composition represents a stage, however fantastic, is indicated not only by a raised curtain but also by the presence of two theatrical masks, one at top center, the other in the center of the painting, surmounting an almost indescribably ornate stage-like erection. This is supported by elaborately decorated and garlanded columns. These columns, in the upper register of the painting, are attenuated, and become thin and candelabra-like, with leafy excrescences. In both the upper and the lower registers of the painting, the viewer catches glimpses of empty space from which emanates what seems to be pure light. Statuettes of cupids surmount the columns. Garlands are hung from the stage-like erection; figures of fantastic animals appear everywhere.

As one studies this painting at length, it becomes more

and more complex to the viewer's eye. The succession of backgrounded columns, stages and arches, and the unexpected glimpses of space and air among them create a strange sense of infinite regress. One is led to wonder what the creator of the painting is trying to say. Is the artist suggesting that all reality is merely a succession of illusions? Or, given the prominence of the theatrical masks, curtain, and implied stage setting in the picture, is he saying that all the world is merely a stage? The message is complex; more than merely depicting a fanciful theatre-scape, the painting raises questions about the relationship of illusion and reality, of theatre and life.

It is not, however, this sophisticated and ambiguous painting alone which raises such questions. There exist other paintings depicting stage settings which are equally ambiguous; for example, two companion pictures from the same room in the House of Pinarius Cerealis.[13] In the painting from the north wall, three female figures are grouped in a kind of central niche raised on a platform. Two pairs of male figures are placed on a lower level on both sides of what clearly is a stage: on the left, a seated bearded man with a younger attendant; on the right, two youths. In its companion piece from the east wall, a corresponding central niche is occupied by a youth in Phrygian dress holding a shepherd's crook, from whom a winged cupid is fleeing. That this youth represents Attis is strongly suggested not only by his garb,

but also by the presence of a young semi-draped female figure, who holds an urn from which water is pouring. It is likely that she represents a nymph of the river Sangarios with which Attis is associated (see Chapter 2), or the river itself. The two other female figures depicted in the painting, also holding urns of water, may well be fellow nymphs.

What is striking about these two paintings is that the artist seems far less interested in the human figures which appear in the paintings than in the stage settings. While they are not so ornate as the fantastic theatre-scape from Herculaneum discussed above, they are nonetheless elaborate; it is possible, however, that the paintings are more or less idealized recreations of actual stage settings. If so, they indicate a taste for purely decorative elements on the part of the theatre-going public. The columns of the central elevated niche have elaborately wrought bases. Above the columns appear fantastic figures of griffins, centaurs, and marine gods; garlands decorate them. The raised central niche seems to serve as a royal--or important--dwelling within the stage setting; the lower level, as a courtyard or street. On the west wall, on the other hand, the raised niche seems to serve as a rustic setting, since a tree (a stage prop?) is seen behind the Attis figure.

It is unclear, however, whether the artist is trying to depict actual stage performances in these two paintings. The human figures represented in them are not wearing conventional

theatrical masks; furthermore, the figures on the north wall suggest the realm of mythology rather than that of theatre itself. The winged cupid fleeing from Attis does not look like a little boy in stage costume. The three females with their watery urns seem to serve an iconographic or mythological function rather than represent actresses engaged in performing a play. While it is hard to say what or whom the figures on the north wall represent, it nonetheless seems likely that what holds true for one wall decoration also holds true for its companion; here too the figures may be drawn from the realm of mythology. Thus, the boundaries between reality, theatre, and fantasy become fluid and blurred.

There are other paintings of stage settings which are equally ambiguous. At times a stage is suggested by the artist, but becomes a decorative motif in itself. A wall from the House of Obelius Firmus[14] shows what looks like a stylized version of the stage settings from the House of Pinarius Cerealis. Since in this painting no depth has been visually created by the artist, who, in Third-Style fashion, has made the spaces between the columns on the stage into flat rectangles of red color, the stage itself looks more like a painted backdrop than a three-dimensional construction. That the artist, nevertheless, means to depict a theatrical setting, however stylized, is suggested by the theatrical masks placed in small niches on either side of the central niche.

In Third-Style fashion, the setting also partakes of the fantastic. The stage structure stands above a black dado and is itself upheld by a pair of griffins, two impossibly attenuated candelabra, and two archaic herms. Adding to the strangeness of the painting, a depth-less, almost ghostly female figure floats, as it were, half-way up in the flat red panel between the central two columns of the stage structure. These, in turn, are placed on delicate bases from which extend elaborate curlicues. The effect of the painting is, even more than in the case of the paintings from the House of Pinarius Cerealis, to create a blurring between reality and fantasy. It is significant that this is done by using the theatre stage--the realm of illusion--as a vehicle.

One of the walls of the Frigidarium of the Homeric House[15] shows an equally fantastic stylization of a stage setting. The central niche in this stage is empty; it is surmounted by an elaborate tripod. The niche is flanked by two nude winged figures, either painted sculptures or possibly mysterious living presences, since the reconstruction of the painting shows them in flesh tones. The central area of the painting is, in turn, flanked by two alcoves of two stories each. In each of the lower alcoves appears a figure, not seemingly standing on ground level but rather floating above it, like the ghostly figure in the painting from the house of Obelius Firmus.

That the painting represents a stage setting is suggested

by the theatrical mask placed on a shelf above each of the two figures. The figure on the left appears to be a lightly draped female; that on the right, a nude male. Whether they serve an allegorical function is unclear. In the niches above, there are much smaller figures, engaged in lively action. On the left, a woman has lifted her arms above her head in amazement or horror; another figure leans over and seems to be reading something. On the right, an older male is showing something to a young woman who recoils slightly.

In this painting the physical world seems to have gone topsy-turvy. Curiously, the scenes suggested beyond the upper level niches depict buildings and street which must be hanging in the air, while birds sit on ledges, not on the upper register, but on the lower. The painting is altogether mysterious. The winged figures are reminiscent of figures from Etruscan tomb paintings,[16] as well as of the winged figure depicted in the Villa of the Mysteries (see Chapter 3), whose identity is unclear. Whatever their significance in this stage-like setting may be, their presence suggests a world where the possibly real and the utterly fantastic merge--again in a kind of theatrical setting.

At times the depiction of a stage becomes the basis of an elaborate pictorial fantasy. A mural from the Stabian Baths at Pompeii[17] demonstrates how theatrical elements and purely pictorial ones meld and merge to create a vision which approaches the surreal. As in the paintings discussed above,

the picture shows a central niche flanked by two side niches; as in the paintings from the House of Pinarius Cerealis, the figures in the central niche are elevated above ground level, on a small platform approached by several steps. In this painting the two figures are Hercules, identifiable by his club and lion skin, and a child, possibly one of Hercules' children. The side niches, however, display not human figures, but rather paintings: recessed landscapes above mythological scenes. All three niches are surmounted by canopies upheld by the impossibly thin columns typical of third-style painting. By combining what seems to be an action scene in the central alcove with purely pictorial themes in the side alcoves, the artist seems to be playing with merging purely visual art with the idea of theatre.

But that is not all there is to the painting. On the far left and the far right, the artist has depicted open doors through which the viewer glimpses nude running female figures, one on each side. They are roughly the same size as the Hercules figure, and may belong either to the realm of theatre or to the real world. Above the canopies there appear yet three more female figures. The central figure seems to be Artemis/Diana, identifiable by the small hind next to her. The two side figures, which are winged, float in the air. Furthermore many small spaces, with flat colored backgrounds, contain tiny human or winged figures, at times seemingly floating on air. The effect is complex. Such a stage could

never have existed; it is merely a visual artist's fantasy; yet one is led to wonder what realms of multiple illusion the painting means to convey. Perhaps the painting may best be described as a fantastic variation on a theatrical theme.

Finally, an all-pervasive interest in theatre is suggested by the ubiquitous presence of theatrical masks as a motif in Campanian visual art. Often they appear in context, that is, in paintings which bear some relationship to the realm of the theatre, such as those in the paintings hitherto discussed in this chapter. At other times, however, they serve as a purely decorative motif, sometimes in unexpected contexts. Thus, for, example, a fragment of a garden scene[18] depicts a trellised fence in front of blooms and vegetation, as well as a peacock and a smaller bird. The latter sits on a small rectangular niche within which sits the theatrical mask of a female character. This may be a realistic depiction of a garden; if so, the presence of the mask merely suggests an enjoyment of theatre on the part of the general public which even extends to garden decoration.

More surprising is the presence of theatrical masks on one of the elaborate walls of the House of the Vetii; here they lie on top of small rectangular depictions of naval battles. It is hard to believe that the artist who painted these meant to make any serious statement, unless perhaps one is meant to see every action in contemporary life as a performance on a stage. More likely they serve here as a

purely decorative motif which has lost its original meaning.

On a badly damaged wall from the House of Meleager,[19] masks again appear as a purely decorative motif. In the photograph which appears in Schefold (unfortunately black and white, and not very clear), a figure seems to float between two thin columns. On either side appears a mask set on a base held up by yet more thin columns; above the masks hang garlands. If this is meant to be a highly stylized depiction of a stage, it is unrecognizable as such, shown thus out of context. For a modern eye, it is perhaps hard to see such theatrical mask motifs as attractive in themselves; at times they may even appear grotesque and disturbing, evoking, with their empty eye sockets and gaping mouths, decapitated heads.[20] It should be kept, in mind, however, that the average city dweller of Ovid's time would hardly have reacted thus, as such masks must have been a familiar sight; it is not really surprising, as it might seem to a twentieth-century viewer, that they should have been used for decorative effect in visual art.

In some paintings, however, the masks do not serve merely a decorative function, but seem to raise questions about the very relationship of reality and theatrical illusion, as do the paintings of stage settings discussed above. One such complex and sophisticated painting, now in Naples, originally appeared on the west wall of the triclinium in the Villa of Boscoreale.[21] In the center of the painting

is a closed door, which extends to about two-thirds of the height of the painting; it is surmounted by a frieze. Above the door, on a blue background, which suggests the sky, floats a black male figure (seemingly a sculpture on an elaborate circular base). The top part of the figure has unfortunately been obliterated; it appears that the figure may have had wings.

The door is flanked by Ionic columns decorated with scrolls, set on what seem to be wooden square bases. These in turn are flanked by simple rectangular posts which presumably uphold the ceiling of the room or hall which the viewer sees. The artist has created the illusion that the posts are located at the front of the room which the viewer has just entered, while the door is located at its farther wall.

On either side of the two wooden posts are yet two more grooved columns, Doric in appearance. On the left and right of these, against a red background, sit two tall and ornate candlelabra decorated with winged figures (a motif, perhaps, almost as ubiquitous as the theatrical masks themselves). Above these a lintel is held up by miniature caryatids. On this are placed two masks: on the left, one of a woman, on the right, one of an old man with white hair and beard. The blue background behind them again suggests the sky. Despite the presence of the masks, the painting does not seem to depict a theatrical setting.

This mysterious painting is clearly the work of a

sophisticated and knowledgeable master. The central door is strongly reminiscent of Etruscan tomb paintings,[22] while the columns in the painting are Greek in appearance. Whatever the origins of the artist, Greek or native Italic, could he have been aware of the Etruscan artistic tradition, however permuted over the course of time, and was he trying consciously to integrate it with the Greek tradition?

The question cannot, of course be answered. If the artist chose, however, to link this painting with the Etruscan tradition, an interesting conundrum is raised. As doors depicted on the walls of Etruscan tombs represent entrances to another realm, that of the dead--whatever that may be--can the artist be suggesting something similar here? Is he saying that, even as one dines in the triclinium, an unknown and mysterious realm is waiting just beyond the wall?

The idea is not necessarily macabre. Indeed, the patches of blue sky suggest something lovely rather than something fearful. Even the winged figure may represent a benign presence, rather like the Etruscan Vanth present at the rites of passage in life, who is normally represented with wings.[23] If the painting is interpreted in some such manner, the masks serve more than a decorative function and become an integral part of the intellectual content of the picture. Their presence may then suggest that the world on this side of the portal is merely theatre, an illusion. Reality is to be found only beyond the door to another life.

The *Amores* as Stage Performance.

The visual evidence of the paintings discussed in this section of the chapter seems to indicate that the idea of theatre pervaded contemporary consciousness. It is not surprising, then, that so sophisticated and urbane a poet as Ovid may have played with this idea in his poetry. In the next section of this chapter I will attempt to show how Ovid's *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*, give evidence of his theatrical mind-set. These three works will be read as Ovid's Theatre of Love.

The *Amores* consists of three books of elegies, condensed from an original five, as Ovid indicates in an epigraph at the beginning of his work.

> qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli
> tres sumus.....

We who were lately the five books of Naso now are three....

The title of the work says it all; the subject of Naso's undertaking is of course *amor*. It is also clear from the first poem onward that Ovid means to be both clever and light-hearted. In *Amores* I-1, the narrator of the poem, the "I", or "Naso", claims to be preparing himself for the serious undertaking of writing epic; Cupid himself intervenes by stealing away the last foot of his epic hexameter couplet--thus creating the conventional elegiac couplet; a very clever beginning indeed:

arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
edere materia convenienta modis;
par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido
dicitur, atque unum surripuisse pedem. (I-1, 1-4)

I was preparing to sound forth arms and violent wars in grave measure, the matter suited to the form, the second verse equal to the first; they say that Cupid laughed and stole away a foot.

It is a clever joke, designed for a sophisticated audience: Ovid was no epic poet, and had no intention whatsoever of becoming one, to judge by the work he has left to posterity. The rest of the poem consists of the narrator's reproaches to Cupid for his act of mischief; Cupid in turn takes revenge on the narrator by shooting him with his arrows, thus causing him to love and to write of love. Here lies the genesis and *raison d'être* of the *Amores*.

The form of this introductory poem sets the paradigm for virtually all of the poems that follow. The male narrator/lover, otherwise known as "I" or "Naso," engages in a dialogue with another being or person whose presence is implied, but whose reply we as readers never hear. It is as if the reader were present and witnessing a scene between the narrator/lover and a succession of his (mute) interlocutors. Virtually all the poems in the three books follow this form; in a very few the narrator addresses the reader directly.[24] The narrator, then, is the protagonist in all the poems; his companions change from poem to poem.

The effect of the entire work is decidedly theatrical. The reader seems to be witnessing a series of rapidly shifting

scenes in a play which is staged against a background which represents the narrator's contemporary Rome. Thus it is not implausible to read the *Amores* as a play in Ovid's Theatre of Love. While the play revolves around the amatory adventures of our omnipresent hero "Naso", his supporting cast is large. Some members of the cast play more important roles than others, returning to the stage repeatedly; others make a single brief appearance, but contribute significant details to the action of the play.

As the title *Amores* implies, the play is concerned chiefly with the love relationships of the lead character, the elegiac poet. The most important female character is a woman named Corinna, both attractive and sexy. The poet's praise of Corinna's physical charms as she stands before him in the nude, having visited him on a sultry afternoon, is not stinted:

> quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!
> forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
> quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!
> quantum et quale latus quam iuvenale femur!
> singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi. (I-5, 19-23)

What shoulders, what arms did I see and touch! What beauty her breasts had, made to be squeezed! How flat her belly was beneath her flawless breast! How long her lovely flank! How youthful her thigh! But why should I tell you all this? I saw nothing unworthy of praise.

While it is possible to cast this Corinna as the main female character, she hardly seems to be the only one. It is no doubt significant that the name Corinna does not appear consistently in the poems, even though the narrator names no

rival by whose charms he may be attracted. It seems likely that Ovid, a clever poet, often omits Corinna's name on purpose. The plural title *Amores* surely implies a series of erotic skirmishes; and there is no reason to suppose that they all take place with a single female partner. Indeed there is evidence that our male protagonist is not an entirely faithful lover. In II-4, "Naso" confesses his inability to be faithful to a single girl since Rome offers so great a variety of attractive women. He is more in love with the idea of love itself:

> non est certa meos quae forme invitet amores;
> centum sunt causae cur ego semper amem. (9-10)

There is no fixed beauty which invites my desire; there are a hundred reasons why I am always in love.

In II-10 the narrator/lover confesses to a friend, Graecinus, that he happens to be in love with two girls at the same time:

> ecce duas uno tempore turpis amo,
> utraque formosa est; operosae cultibus ambae,
> artibus in dubio est haec sit an illa prior. (4-6)

Behold, foolishly I love two girls at once; both are beautiful, both elegant in their appearance; It is not clear whether one surpasses the other in her accomplishments.

Furthermore, that he is an unrepentant philanderer is revealed in the scenes played out in the companion poems II-7 and 8. The narrator/lover has been sleeping not only with Corinna, but also with her handmaid Cypassis, and Corinna has caught on. In 7 he protests his innocence to Corinna; in 8 we see him quite unrepentant, intending to keep on having Cypassis on

the side. The two scenes are worthy of a bedroom farce.

The narrator's characterization of himself as an erotic adventurer, then, suggests that, concurrent with his relationship with Corinna, he is enjoying the favors of several other women. The cast of Ovid's Theatre of Love in the *Amores*, thus includes a number of other attractive girls, running on and off the stage in successive scenes. Other supporting actors include the narrator's male friends (e.g. Atticus in I-9, the aforementioned Graecinus in II-10, and Macer in II-18). There are also menials and servants: doorkeepers (I-6), guardians (Bagoas in II-2 and an unnamed eunuch in II-3), maidservants (Nape in I-11 and 12), even characters from the murky underworld of Rome (the drunken bawd Dipsas, I-8).

The cast also includes cuckolded husbands. In one of the scenes in our farce, one such is directly addressed by the narrator/lover. The gist of his advice to the husband, almost as convoluted as a legal argument, goes something like this: do not bother setting a guardian on your wife; it is human nature to stray less if you are free. On the other hand, a woman who is well guarded is more desired by potential lovers, since there is the attraction of the danger involved. And, finally, you might as well be indulgent; your wife will get presents, which might be useful to the household, from her lovers--take what you can get. Although, this scene may be written tongue-in-cheek, it is probably the most cynical poem

in the *Amores*, perhaps a comment on the venality of the circles in which our narrator/lover moves.

The presence of the husband figure is often felt even if he does not actually appear on the stage. The eternal triangle reasserts itself repeatedly in Ovid's Theatre of Love. Thus, for example, in II-4, the protagonist instructs his girl how to behave at a banquet where all three--husband, wife, and lover--will be present. But it becomes clear that he is not so clever as he thinks he is. The girls sometimes beat him at his own game. Ovid seems to be taking a dig at the narrator who thinks that he is in control of his relationships; the male ego is somewhat deflated. The girls have other lovers on the side too. Thus in II-5, the narrator finds that his girl is following the instructions given in the previous scene precisely, but with another man.

In III-3, he becomes indignant about yet another deception on the part of one of his girls; yet he must be given credit for forgiving her; he is not really a bad sort. His reason is that even gods give in to beautiful liars:

> formosas superi metuunt offendere laesi
> atque ultro quae se timuere timent. (31-32)
>
> The gods above, even when wronged, fear to offend beautiful girls, and are afraid to take vengeance on those who are not afraid of them.

Thus our narrator/lover ruefully admits to being bested by his girls now and then. Our play in the Theatre of Love is hardly a put-down of women; despite the narrator's pretenses, it is the girls who perhaps control him more that he does them.

Beings from the realm of mythology also appear on the stage, just as they do in the fantastic stage settings descibed earlier in this chapter. Cupid, who set the play in motion by shooting "Naso" with his arrows at the beginning of the *Amores*, appears on the stage one more time, and his presence is felt throughout the entire work. In II-9 the narrator castigates Cupid for giving no relief to his faithful soldier of love:

> o in corde meo desidiose puer,
> quid me qui miles numquam tua signa reliqui
> laedis, et in castris vulneror ipse meis?
> cur tua fax urit figit tuus arcus amicos? (2-5)

Oh idle boy, why do you wound me in my heart, though I, your soldier, never abandoned your standards? Why does your torch burn and transfix your friends?

Other mythological or allegorical beings appear on the stage with the denizens of Rome, just as, centuries later in baroque opera, human beings share the stage with allegorical abstractions.[25] Thus in III-1, a kind of comic *apologia pro arte sua*, the narrator encounters Elegy and Tragedy in a sacred grove and converses with them. In III-6, he addresses a Stream; the poem becomes an elaborate and lengthy (106 lines) account of the loves of a multitude of river gods. In I-13 the protagonist converses with Aurora, asking her to delay her journey over the sky so that he can sleep longer with his girl. It is not, after all, his fault that she has an ancient husband whose bed she is only too eager to leave every morning:

> illum dum refugis longo quia grandior avo

surgis ad invisas a sene mane rotas,
at si quem mavis Cephalum complexa teneres,
clamares, "lente currite noctis equi!" (37-40)

As you flee from him, because he is far older than you, you rise in the morning to go from the old man to the chariot hated by him. But if you held Cephalus--whom you much prefer, you would cry, "Run slowly, horses of the night!"

The *Amores* as Theatre of Love can be read, then, as a fantasy play which combines real and mythological elements, as do the wall paintings of the fantastic stage settings discussed earlier in this chapter. It is an erotic fantasy in the comic mode, as its plot deals with the adventures and misadventures of its protagonist, the ups and downs of his sexual encounters. Sometimes he is successful and even ecstatic, as, for example in II-12, where the soldier of love has conquered Corinna despite all obstacles:

ite, triumphales circum mea tempora lauros!
vicimus, in nostro est ecce Corinna sinu
quam vir, quam custos, quam ianua firma
servabant, neque posset ab arte capi tot hostes. (1-4)

Come, place triumphal laurels round my temples! I have conquered; look, Corinna lies on my breast--she whom so many enemies were guarding: her husband, her keeper, a strong gate, lest she be captured by my skill.

At other times the narrator/lover hits low points in his amatory adventures. In III-8, he laments the fact that one of his girls has had the bad taste to prefer a career military man (sanguine pastus eques, 10 [a knight fed on blood]) to himself, the elegiac poet. In II-16 "Naso" has returned to his native Sulmo and misses his girl. Here Ovid has seen fit to add an autobiographical touch; he is pretending that he really is his protagonist "Naso" whose amatory adventures have

been played out on the stage of the Theatre of Love: no doubt an in-joke designed for his circle in Rome.

While the tone of most of the scenes in this play is clever and sophisticated, at times they move into the realm of broad farce. Thus III-7 takes place in a prostitute's room. Much as he tries, the narrator/lover simply cannot get an erection. Perhaps the most absurdly farcical scene--and the funniest in the *Amores*--takes place in I-14. "Naso's" girl has lost her hair as the result of an excessive use of the curling iron! A tragedy indeed, and one which speaks volumes to Ovid's twentieth-century woman readers.

Although the backdrop of the play represents Rome, all the action in the play takes place in a fantasy world, like that in which Propertius' narrator and his Cynthia play out their affair (see Chapter 3). The only concern and occupation of our narrator, his girls, and the other personages in the cast is the conduct of their sexual adventures. The real world of Rome does not obtrude on their erotic encounters; they are not concerned with political, military, commercial issues or social problems. The daily life of Roman citizens, freedmen, foreigners and slaves has nothing to do with this play. Nevertheless, the Theatre of Love offers a few brief glimpses into some of the harder realities of life faced even by professional lovers.

In I-7 we discover that our narrator/lover, though now contrite, has beaten up his girl. In terms of the real world,

it is not a pleasant scene to visualize; yet Ovid's scene is hardly a serious comment on domestic violence. The inflated and bombastic language used by the poet reduces a serious subject, disturbing to present-day readers, to the comic; it is merely another incident designed to add some excitement to the plot of the play:

> in mea vaesanas habui dispendere vires
> et valui poenam fortis in ipse meam;
> quid mihi vobiscum cadis scelerumque ministrae;
> debita sacrilegia vincla subite manus. (25-28)

I used my mad strength against myself, and was worthy of a great punishment. What have I to do with you, ministers of slaughter and crime! Sacrilegious hands, submit to the shackles you deserve!

Another serious issue obtrudes briefly in II-13 and 14: unwanted pregnancy, an issue which in the real world affects women's lives profoundly. In the first of these two scenes (13), Corinna has chosen to have an abortion, and now lies gravely ill; in the second (14), the narrator reproaches her for her act. Treated in a serious manner, these scenes could be moving, even tragic; yet once again Ovid reduces them to a trivial level by verbal bombast and the piling on of mythological allusions:

> si mos antiquis placuisset matribus idem,
> gens hominum vitio deperitura fuit;
> quique iterum iaceret genus primordia nostri
> in vacuo lapidus orbe parandus erat;
> quis Priami fregisset opes si numen aquarum
> iusta recussasset pondera ferre Thetis?
> Ilia si tumido geminos in ventre necasset,
> casurus dominae conditor urbis erat;
> si Venus Aenean gravida temerasset in alvo,
> Caesaribus tellus orbe futura fuit. (II-14, 9-18)

If this same custom had found favor with mothers in

> oldentimes, the race of men would have perished by their vice, and someone would have to be found to cast stones again, beginnings of our race. Who would have broken the forces of Priam if the goddess of the waters, Thetis, had refused to bear her burden? If Ilia had killed the twins in her swelling belly, the founder of our city would have been lost. If pregnant Venus had threatened Aeneas in her womb, the future orb of earth would be deprived of her Caesars.

What could have been a serious statement becomes banal, merely another melodramatic plot-twist.

Thus, despite these brief glimpses into the darker side of erotic relationships, the play of the *Amores* remains a comedy of sex, not a serious statement about sexual relationships between men and women. It is a clever entertainment, a pastime; and yet there are a few moments when their author is serious. It is not when he deals with *amor*; it is when he talks about his chosen art, poetry.

Poetry circumscribes the *Amores*; it is the beginning and the end of the work; and it is in the poems dealing with poetry that it is hard to separate the poet Ovid from his narrator. Book I, as it has been shown, begins with a clever and light-hearted comment on the narrator's calling as love elegist; it ends with an apology not only for his own poetry, but for poetry in general (I-15). Poetry for Ovid is immortal; in the conclusion to Book I, he first enumerates the great poets of the Greek tradition: Homer, Hesiod, Callimachus, Sophocles, and Menander. He then names his Roman forebears in the poetic art, as well as those of his contemporaries whom he deems worthy of immortality: Ennius, Varro, Lucretius, Tibullus, and Gallus. The poem ends with

his well-known and moving comment about his own poetic calling: one of the few realities about which he can be serious:

> ergo etiam cum me supremus adederet ignis,
> vivam parsque mei multa superstes erit. (41-42)

Therefore, when the final fires will have consumed me I shall live, and a great part of me will survive.

Although Book II also begins with a comment on the *ars poetica*, it does not end with one; the symmetry established in Book I does not exist here. The last poem (19) concerns the love triangle of the narrator, Corinna, and her husband. However, since we find a poem about poetry in the next to last slot (18), it may be conjectured that a pattern of beginning and ending each of the books may have been been broken as the result of an error when the original five books to which Ovid refers in his epigraph were reduced to three. It is possible either that a poem about poetry was deleted, or that 18 and 19 were inadvertently reversed, since the symmetrical pattern of circumscribing each book with poetry appears again in Book III.

In II-1 Ovid plays once again at identifying himself with his narrator/lover for the amusement of his audience:

> hoc quoque composui Paelignis natus aquosis
> ille ego nequitiae Naso poeta meae. (1-2)

I also composed this, the son of watery Paeligni--I, the well-known Naso, poet of my failings.

Once again he makes an apology for preferring the seemingly trivial genre of love elegy (blanditias elegasque levis, 21)

to the weightier epic. The poem contains a passage of praise for the power of poetry, which here is equated to magic. For once it does not seem that Ovid has his tongue in cheek when he writes the following verses:

> carmina sanguineae deducunt cornua lunae,
> et revocant niveas solis euntis eques;
> carmina dissiliunt abruptis faucibus angues,
> inque suos fonts versa recurrit aqua.
> carminibus cessere fores insertaque posti
> quamvis robur erat, carmine victa sera est. (23-28)

Songs bring down the horns of the blood-red moon, and call back the snowy horses of the departing sun; through song, serpents leap back, withdrawing their jaws; water runs back to its source. Through song, doors have yielded and the clamps in their posts, though strong, have been conquered.

Poem 18, which, as it has been suggested, may have been intended to close Book 2, is addressed to a fellow poet, Macer, who devotes himself to epic. Here Ovid seems self-deprecatory about his love poetry:

> nos Macer ignava Veneris cessamus in umbra
> et tener ausuros grandia frangit Amor. (3-4)

Macer, I linger in the slothful shade of Venus, and delicate Cupid breaks down those about to dare great things. This poem is interesting from the standpoint of literary history. Not only does Ovid make reference to an unnamed successful tragedy he wrote (huic operi quamlibet aptus eram, 14; nonetheless I was fit for that task). Presumably he is referring to his lost *Medea*. A good part of the poem is also devoted to a summary of his *Heroides* (21-34), although he never mentions the work by name.

The introductory poem to Book III is as clever and fanciful as I-1, wherein the narrator was smitten by Cupid,

causing him to write the entire work. This time the narrator finds himself in a sacred grove, accosted by Elegy and Tragedy. The amusing description of the two ladies is worth citing:

> hinc ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris,
> quod mea quaerebam, Musa, moveret opus,
> venit odoratos Elegia nexa capillos
> et puto pes illi longior alter erat.
> forma decens vestis tenuissima vultus amantis
> et pedibus vitium causa decoris erat.
> venit et ingenti violenta Tragoedia passu,
> fronte comae torva, palla iacebat humi
> laeva manus sceptrum late regale movebat,
> Lydius alta pedum vincla cothurnus erat. (5-14)

As I was strolling here, covered by the shade of the grove, I asked myself what work my Muse would bring forth. There came Elegy, her fragrant hair coiled, and I think that one of her feet was longer than the other. Her beauty was modest, her clothes very light, her countenance loving--and her flawed foot a cause of her grace. There also came violent Tragedy with huge strides, her hair twisted on her forehead, her cloak trailing on the ground; with her left hand she grandly waved a royal sceptre, and a Lydian buskin was on her foot.

It is not difficult to guess to whose charms our poet/narrator will succumb.

It is hard to deny that this scene, worthy of baroque opera, would be effective performed on a stage. Thus even an apology for poetry is cast in a theatrical mode; the reader is reminded once more that Ovid has staged a Theatre of Love. And once again the poet canot help but be clever for the benefit of his public; The six-foot, five-foot alternation of the elegiac metre becomes, improbably, the personification of a lovely lady with lopsided gait.

Ovid's farewell to his audience at the end of the *Amores*

is brief (20 lines) and personal. His poetry is to be a source of pride for his native Paeligni, as was Virgil's for Mantua, Catullus' for Verona (Mantua Vergilio gaudet Verona Catullo/ Paeligniae dicar gloria gentis ego, 7-8 [Let Mantua rejoice in Virgil, and Verona in Catullus; I shall be called the glory of the race of Paeligni]). It is the poet that speaks, not the male lover/narrator, whose erotic adventures the *Amores* has chronicled.

There is, however, one more poem about poetry in this work which should not be passed over, III-9. It is a lament on the death of Ovid's fellow poet Tibullus. The greater part of the poem is theatrical and clever, yet another fantasy scene in the Theatre of Love. First, Cupid comes weeping to Tibullus' funeral pyre, pitiful and bedraggled (7-14); Venus herself is present and weeps (15-16). Then Delia and Nemesis, Tibullus' fictive mistresses, approach the pyre (55-58), conversing, though rivals, in quite a friendly manner.[26]

Yet in the last part of the poem Ovid briefly abandons the stage, as it were, and makes one of his rare direct addresses to the reader. He drops the theatrical trappings that he has used in the rest of the poem and admits that he is moved in the face of mortality, thereby moving the reader by his heartfelt lines on the death of a friend and fellow poet:

> si tamen e nobis aliquid nisi nomen et umbra
> restat, in Elysia valle Tibullus erit
> obvius hunc venias hedera iuvenalia cinctus
> tempora cum Calvo, docte Catulle, tuo
> tu quoque si falsus est temerati crimen amici
> sanguinis atque animae prodige, Galle, tuae

his comes umbra tua est, siqua est modo corporis umbra,
auxisti numeros, culte Tibulle, pios
ossa quieta precor tuta requiescit in urna
et sit humus cineri non onerosa tuo. (59-68)

If something of us survives except for a name and a ghost, Tibullus will be in the Elysian vale. May you come to meet him, your youthful brow bound with ivy, learned Catullus, together with your Calvus; you too, Gallus, generous with your blood and your spirit, if the charge of crime against your friend be false. Your shade is their comrade; if there exists merely a shadow of your body, you have increased the ranks of the blessed, gracious Tibullus. Dear bones, rest safely in your quiet urn; and may the earth be no burden to your ashes.

The *Ars Amatoria*: Cinematic Technique and Acting Manual.

The *Ars Amatoria* is the didactic companion piece to the *Amores*; what Ovid has set forth in the brief succesive scenes of the *Amores* is developed more fully and at greater length in its three books. Its intent is to teach the reader how to become *doctus* (or *docta*, as the case may be), that is, learned, or skilled, in *amor*, as its very first lines indicate:

si quis in hoc artem populo non novit amandi,
hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet. (I-1, 1-2)

If anyone in this populace does not know how to love, let him read this; and having read the poem, may he love with skill.

In this section I will attempt to demonstrate that, although the *Ars Amatoria* is a sophisticated spoof of the didactic genre, it too, like the *Amores*, can be read as another performance in Ovid's Theatre of Love.

It should be noted, before beginning the examination of

the *Ars*, just whom Ovid sets out to instruct. In the course of the work, it becomes clear that it is not everyman and everywoman; the *Ars* is addressed to a specific audience: men of leisure who can devote themselves to the pursuit of *amor*, and women who are not restricted by the moral laws governing respectable Roman matrons:

> .....petite hinc praecepta, puellae
> quas pudor et leges et sua iura sinunt. (III, 57-58)
>
> Seek precepts here, girls, you whom propriety and the laws and your rights allow it.

At first sight, Ovid's *Ars* seems to be aimed at the demi-monde of Rome, a shifting population of women of uncertain class who exist by selling their sexual favors and the men who have the money and leisure to buy them. It should be noted, however, that the *Ars*, like the *Amores*, is not a reflection of Roman reality. The men and women addressed in this work, too, exist in an artificial world, a stage whose backdrop represents Rome. Their only concern and business is *amor*, sexual liaisons on an ever-circling carousel of love. The problems of the real world affect them no more than they do the cast of the *Amores*.

In the *Amores* the protagonist was the male lover/narrator "Naso." In the *Ars*, our narrator is less a lover than a teacher of love, as befits a didactic poem, and the implication is that "Naso" has now become an expert in his chosen field of love and through the experience gained in the *Amores* is now fit to instruct others. The *raison d'être* for

the work is clear: *amor*, like any other civilized undertaking,[27] is a skill or art (the Latin word carries both meanings) which must be learned, not a natural function. Instruction in this skill is the goal of the poem, as its teacher/narrator makes clear from the beginning:

> arte citae veloque rates remoque moventur,
> arte leves amores, arte regendus amor (I, 3-4)
>
> With skill swift ships are moved by oar and sail; with skill, swift chariots; love, too, must be governed with skill.

Our narrator/teacher is competent; his instructions proceed clearly and are well organized. Books I and II are specifically addressed to males. The first book deals with step one: how to find a suitable partner and initiate a sexual liaison; the second, its logical sequel, proceeds to step two: how to act once the liaison is actually taking place. Book III is addressed to females; it proceeds directly to step two, the tacit implication being that it is the men whose task it is to initiate a sexual relationship, which is perhaps the reflection of a certain sexual bias on the part of our narrator/teacher, or perhaps merely the reflection of cultural reality.

When Ovid set out to write a didactic poem--and to set the didactic genre on end--he must have taken as at least one of his models Lucretius' great didactic work, *De Rerum Natura*, parts of which have been discussed in Chapter I. The Invocation to Venus and the section of Book IV which deals with male sexuality, however, represent only a minor part of

the work, which is a detailed exposition of the natural philosophy of Epicurus. Its subject is, of course, serious and complex; the poem attempts to explain, as the title implies, the very nature of the world. It is, in fact, clear, that Ovid knew Lucretius' work and admired it, since he lists him as one of the poets worthy of renown in the *Amores*.[28] Furthermore, there is a direct echo of Lucretius, albeit in an unexpected context, in the *Ars* itself. In Book III, the narrator, who is in the process of urging the girls he addresses to seize the day before old age arrives, says:

> conteritur ferrum, silices tenuantur ab usui,
> sufficit et damni pars caret illa metu. (91-92)

Iron is worn down, flint is attenuated by use. That part suffices, and has no fear of extinction.

These lines closely recall a passage in Lucretius' Book I, wherein, in a totally different context, the poet tries to explicate how atoms, the ultimate particles of matter, unseen by the human eye, can be separated from physical objects:

> quin etiam multis solis redeuntibus annis
> anulus in digito subter tenuatur habendo;
> stilicidi casus lapidem cavat uncus aratri,
> ferreus occulto decrescit vomer in arvis,
> strataque iam volgi pedibus detrita viarum
> saxea conspicimus, tum portas propter aena
> signa manus dextras ostendunt adtenuari
> saepe salutandum tactu praeterque meantum. (311-318)

Moreover, as the sun returns in the course of the years, the ring on one's finger is thinned out as it is worn; falling drops hollow out a tone; the curved iron ploughshare in the fields is diminished unseen; now we see the paving on roads worn away by the feet of the masses; then bronze statues near gateways show forth hands worn down at the touch of passers-by.

The *Ars* deals with what amounts to a trivial matter, in

contrast to Lucretius' great work, yet Ovid surely is indirectly playing tribute to his predecessor in the brief passage cited above by echoing his words.

We shall now examine the *Ars Amatoria* in order to demonstrate that, although it takes the form of a didactic poem, it too can be read as another play in Ovid's Theatre of Love. Our narrator/expert in love begins his teaching by giving detailed instructions (I, 1-262) on where to meet suitable and available girls by listing a series of specific locations in Rome: thus the backdrop or scenery for our play has been created by the author. The rapid enumeration of actual places in Rome gives the curious effect of a movie camera following the narrator/teacher as he points out the flocks of girls gathered here and there, ready to be viewed and appraised.[29] The camera pans from the Portico of Pompey (67) to the Portico of Octavia (71-72) and to the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine (73-74). It then moves in turn to the Temple of Venus (75-76) and the Temple of Isis (77-78) on the Campus Martius. We see a kind of travelogue of Rome; as we follow the imaginary camera, our imaginary theatre becomes peopled not only with the crowds of women milling about these places, but also with troops of potential male lovers moving from place to place, inspecting what goods may be available, as it were.

The travelogue continues. The law courts may not be, surprisingly, a bad source of girls:

et fora conveniunt, quis credere possit, amori
flammaque in arguto saepe reperta foro. (79-80)

Even the law courts are suitable for *amor*--who would believe it?--and its flame is often found in the noisy square. Here one suspects another subtle in-joke on Ovid's part, who trained as a lawyer before devoting himself to poetry. The theatres of Rome are another excellent source of girls (89-101). It is in this passage that one of Ovid's best-known *bons mots* occurs, a comment on women spectators to which his twentieth-century reader can readily relate: spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectantur ut ipsae (99) (they come to see, and they come to be seen). In turn, the narator/teacher also suggests dalliances at the Circus Maximus (135-170) and at a mock naval fight (171-176).[30]

The next two sources of girls to which the narrator/teacher directs his pupils are not specific geographical locations but rather typical scenes in Rome. Our imaginary camera moves first to a triumphal procession (212-228), and then to a banquet scene (229-252). The travelogue finally ends at a distance from Rome, near Naples at the resort of Baiae (253-262).

While the metaphor of cinematic technique can perhaps best describe this section of Book I, its effect is nonethess decidedly theatrical. It is as if the reader were watching throngs of people moving across a great stage. At this point one may well ask who plays the leading role in this performance. Clearly the protagonist is our narrator/teacher,

the guide around whom the action revolves, rather like Fellini in his *Roma*, who narrates and explicates the scenes he has chosen to film for his cinema audience.

The latter part of Book I (263-270) is devoted to the techniques of seduction. If the first part of the book gives a kind of panoramic view of Rome, with large crowded scenes, the second part consists of small intimate scenes, not unlike those in the *Amores*. Each specific piece of instruction given by the narrator/teacher suggests a brief scene played between a potential male lover and the girl he hopes to obtain, or another character essential for the seduction. Thus, in the first scene we see the male lover approaching his girl's handmaid, hoping to win her over (351-398). The *amator* may not (like the protagonist in the *Amores*) necessarily be faithful, even before he has gained his mistress, though he grants that there is a certain risk involved in dallying with her servants on the side. As our sophisticated narrator puts it:

> quaeris an hanc ipsam prosit violare ministram;
> talibus admissis alea grandis est.
> haec a concubitu fit sedula, tardior illa,
> haec dominae munus te parat illa sibi (375-378)

You ask whether it is useful to seduce the handmaid herself. Admittedly, in such matters there are great risks. One, after sleeping with you, may be quite eager, another less so; one readies you as a gift to her mistress, another for herself.

What such a scene suggests is that the word *amor* does not correspond to the word "love" in its most ordinary sense, but rather means "sexual liaison"; which, it must be added, can of

course can be highly pleasurable for both partners, calculated as it may be. Such calculated sexual intrigue, however requires acting ability, and the play of the *Ars Amatoria* is a sophisticated one, not a mindless romantic comedy.

The next few scenes show us, in turn, an *amator* writing a seduction letter to his girl (437-458); approaching her litter (481-504), and drinking at a banquet with her (565-588). What is stressed throughout this part of the book is artifice and appearance. The narrator/teacher's message is, in brief: to seduce a girl, act in the most expedient way, and play your role as lover well:

> est tibi agendus amans imitandaque vulnera verbis,
> haec tibi quaeratur quaelibet arte fides. (611-612)

You must act the lover, and feign wounds with your words; her trust must be won by whatever skill you have.

Furthermore, physical appearance is all-important. In Ovid's Theatre of Love, the male lover must not only act well, but also look the part. The specific advice given by the narrator/teacher on how to look attractive to girls transcends the centuries. It echoes too clearly the advice meted out to the sexually active twentieth-century young male by the popular Western media: dress well (a tan helps), get a good haircut, and use breath mints.

> munditie placeant fuscentur corpora Campo,
> sit bene conveniens et sine labe toga;
> lingula ne ruget, careant rubugine dentes,
> nec male deformet rigidos tonsura capillos.
> sit coma, sit docta barba reserta manu,
> et nihil emineant et sint sine sordibus ungues
> inque cava nullus stet tibi nare pilus,
> nec male odorati sit tristis anhelitus oris. (513-521)

Let your body be pleasing in it cleanliness, and get it tanned on the Campus; let your toga fit well and be spotless; let your shoe-straps be unwrinkled and your teeth unstained. Don't let a bad haircut spoil your smooth locks; let your hair and beard be trimmed by a skilled hand. Keep your nails short and free of dirt, and leave no hairs showing in your curved nostrils; and don't let your breath smell foul in your mouth.

However, although attractive dress and manly appearance are appropriate for the stage *amator*, the narrator/ teacher also suggests, at the end of the book, that he must at times cultivate a pale and wan appearance in order to play the unrequited lover:

palleat omnis amans: hic est color aptus amanti;
hoc decet, hoc stulti non valuisse putent. (729-730)

Let all lovers be pale; this is the proper color for the lover; this is fitting; let fools think that this has not worked.

The reader may well assume that the the tanned and athletic stage lover is to accomplish this with a combination of some white makeup and droopy posturing.

The emphasis placed on artifice throughout Book I is equally pronounced in Book II. In this act of the play, however, the lover can remove his white makeup, inasmuch as now he has become successful in his quest for a sexual partner. The narrator/teacher will now instruct him in the conduct of a pleasurable liaison. Now that the male lover's object has been attained, however, sincerity is not the name of the game. The narrator states with clarity that in this act of the play, one must not only play his part well, but also with subtlety:

si latet ars prodest; adfert deprensa pudorem

atque adimit merito tempus in omne fidem. (313-315)

If art is concealed, it works; if detected, it brings forth shame, and, deservedly, destroys trust forever.

The Theatre of Love of Book II is perhaps a trifle less exciting than that of Book I; scenes of requited *amor* do not have the same bite as scenes which depict the pursuit of love. This act smacks of romantic comedy, with its minor ups and downs but happy outcome. We see the stage lover winning over his mistress' handmaids (251-260), and bringing little gifts (261-272). He dances attendance on his girl (287-310); there is a brief sick-room scene (315-335). The course of the relationship does not always run smoothly; in a brief scene a quarrel takes place (though deliberately provoked by the lover to keep the relationship from going stale); a scene of reconciliation ensues (441-466).

Even the narrator/teacher's advice seems a bit less cynical and worldly than in the first book. Though *amor* is merely a sexual liaison based on artifice, it is to be enjoyed by both partners, not by the male lover alone. Although everything in Books I and II has thus far suggested that the male lover is the active seducer, and the girls he seeks and wins merely his prey, in the conclusion of the book, the narrator/teacher insists on the equality of men and women in the sexual act. Equal pleasure if to be gained by both: the woman is not an object, but an active partner.

sed neque tu dominam velis maioribus usus
desine, nec cursus anteat illa tuos;
ad metam properate simul, tum plena voluptas

cum pariter victi femina virque iacent. (725-729)

But do not leave your mistress behind, using larger sails, nor let her precede you in the race; hasten to the goal-post together. Pleasure is complete when man and woman lie together, equally spent.

Thus the last scene in the play shows us two lovers together in bed, despite our narrator's coy claim that the doors of the bedchamber have been shut for the sake of modesty (703-704). The narrator's detailed description of two lovers reaching their climax together leaves no doubt about the happy outcome of the romantic comedy of Book II. The reader is allowed to leave the Theatre of Love retaining a pleasurable illusion. As the curtain falls, he is not asked to recall that, in the real world, sexual liaisons based on artifice are bound to run their course, and that tears, recriminations, and anger lie ahead. But this is theatre, not life.

While in Books I and II the narrator/teacher addresses members of his own sex, in Book III he turns to women. Although this book is more overtly didactic, and admittedly harder to read as a succession of scenes in a play, it too seems, nonetheless, to have its roots in the perception of life as theatrical performance. The book is essentially a disquisition on the art of appearance. It covers, as it were, the technical aspects of stage makeup, costuming, as well as techniques of acting, for the benefit of the women actors in Ovid's Theatre of Love.

It will be recalled that the narrator/teacher of the *Ars Amatoria* took some pains to counsel the potential male lover

on attractive appearance (see the discussion of Book I above). He goes into far more detail in his advice to women. Again, it is advice that has transcended the centuries; it is precisely what every North American woman (and one suspects, every woman in the industrial nations of the world) hears, sees, and reads from her early teens onward. First, he recommends elegance rather than garishness; and second, the importance of recognizing what suits an individual woman best:

> per quas nos petitis saepe fugatis opes;
> munditiis capimur; non sint sine lege capilli,
> admotae formam dantque negant manus
> nec genus ornatus unum est quodque quamquam decebit
> eleget et speculum consulat ante suum. (132-136)

Showiness with which you seek us often repels; we are taken with elegance; do not let you hair be lawless. The use of your hand gives--or takes away--beauty. And there is no single way of adornment; whatever suits a girl, let her choose it, and let her consult her own mirror.

Having pronounced these general principles of attractive appearance, the teacher/narrator goes into detail. In a lengthy passage about hairdressing (137-167), he urges each woman to arrange her hair to suit the shape of her own face--whether parted in the middle, gathered in a knot, in locks or braids, or even artfully neglected. Ever the realist, he even suggests hair dye or the use of a wig for the older (but attractive) woman: he is not an ageist:

> nos male detegimur raptique aetate capilli
> ut Borea frondes excutiente cadunt,
> femina canitiem Germanis inficit herbis
> et melior vero quaritur arte color;
> femina procedit densissima crinibus eruptis
> proque suis alios efficit aere suos, (161-166)

Shamefully, we are denuded, and our hair is lost with

age; it falls out, as when Boreas shakes down leaves. A woman colors her white hair with German herbs, and with skill a better color is sought. A woman goes out with thick hair (bought); and with money she obtains new hair in place of her own.

Stage costume is all important in any performance. In an even lengthier passage (169-192), the narrator/teacher veritably waxes lyrical over the variety of colors, inexpensive at that, which are available for the garb of women: blue, blue-green, bright yellow, pink, purple, brown and beige....The point, of course, is to pick the most becoming color: elige certos, nam non conveniens omnibus omnis erit (choose the right ones, for not all will be suitable to every woman, 187-188). Appropriate make-up is equally important, but must be subtly applied (199-210). At this point, Ovid briefly shows his own face behind the narrator's persona: he makes a self-reference to his treatise on make-up, *De Medicamine Faciei Feminae*, perhaps just to remind his audience that he, the poet, is still manipulating his narrator/teacher.

The rest of Book III covers what might best be described as stage deportment: the skill of playing one's part best in the Theatre of Love. Part of the strategy is to accentuate one's best points and to conceal one's worst (263-280). In summary: conceal physical defects with clothing; draw no attention to the less felicitous parts of your anatomy. Above all, learn how to laugh, move, sing and dance (281-350) during your performance; all these actions are skills which must be

learned and do not come naturally. Even proper facial expression must be learned to project the right image:

spectantem specta ridenti mollia ride
innuet accepta tu quoque redde notas. (513-514)

Look at him when he looks, smile gently as he smiles; should he nod, nod back when you see it.

There is even an art to making an effective entrance on the stage; the scene here happens to be a banquet:

sera veni positaque decens incede lucerna,
grata mora venies maxima lena mora est. (751-752)

Come late; walk in gracefully when the lantern has been set out. Come with a pleasant delay--delay itself serves as the best procuress.

The implication seem to be that an artful entrance on the stage of love can be sexually exciting in itself.

The basic acts of eating and drinking must also be done with style, not sloppily. Ovid's tongue is clearly in his cheek when his narrator fatuously gives quite blunt and earthy advice to his actresses, who, after all, seem to be savvy women about town. His advice on eating is: ora nec immunda tota perunque manu (don't smear your whole face with a dirty hand, 756); and on drinking: nec quae singula bina vide (don't get drunk so you see double, 764). The poet's joke is on the narrator/teacher; Ovid seems to be subverting his narrator, thus giving a clue that all the advice that he has been handing out hardly needs to be taken seriously.

The climax of Book III comes with the narrator/teacher's instructions on the proper performance of the sexual act, which he introduces with a coy excuse for their inclusion:

ulteriora pudet docuisse, sed alma Dione
praecipue nostrum est quod pudet, inquit, opus. (769-770)

It is embarrassing to teach these last things; but kindly Dione said, "That which is embarrasing is above all the matter at hand."

Indeed, the business of sex is what the whole performance is all about. Having been given this spurious command by the goddess herself, the narrator/teacher proceeds to give lengthy instructions on sexual positions during intercourse. Even in the primal act, all depends on appearance. Once again, women actors in Ovid's Theatre of Love are urged to display themselves at their best and hide their weak points; even the sexual act is calculated. As the narrator points out,...mille modi veneris (there are a thousand ways of having sex, 787). It is picking the right one--like the right hairdo or the right dress--that counts. The passage--and book--ends with instructions on how to counterfeit an orgasm, should it be necessary. Ultimately, the point seems to be that all human actions, even the most basic ones, may be part of the theatre performance that is life.

The underlying message, however, of Book III seems to be that if women play their parts successfully in Ovid's Theatre of Love, they can be as manipulative--and as successful--as their male counterparts. Yet this cynical view of the sexual relationships between men and women is conveyed with such wit and cleverness that it is easy to see the narrator's advice to women as a protracted joke, as trivial as the advice he has given his male lovers in the previous two books. The reader

knows, after all, that Ovid's Theatre of Love has very little to do with the complexity, beauty, and pain of love relationships between men and women in the real world. However, a more serious Ovid reveals himself briefly to his reader in a passage that is out of tune with the rest of the book.

After a long and bombastic introductory passage to the book, crammed with mythological allusions (is Ovid poking a bit of fun at his predecessor Propertius here?), the narrator/teacher urges the women whom he is addressing to take advantage of youth to ensnare men. Suddenly the tone changes from the comically bombastic to serious. We see that Ovid is, after all sensitive to the transitory nature of beauty and of life itself. The passages which starts out praising expediency, that is, using one's youthful charms to one's advantage, turns into a commentary on mortality:

> quam cito me miserum laxantur corpora rugis
> et perit in nitido qui fuit ore color.
> quasque fuisse tibi canas a virgine iuras
> spargentur subito per caput omne comae;
> anguibus exultur tenui cum pelle vetustas,
> nec faciunt cervos cornua iacta senes.
> nostra sine auxilio fugiunt bona; carpite florem
> qui nisi carptus erit turpitu ipse cadet. (73-80)

How swiftly (ah me!) bodies are furrowed with wrinkles, and how swiftly perishes the coloring of a glowing face. And whatever white hairs you had, you swear, from maidenhood on, are suddenly sprinkled all over your head. Serpents cast off old age with a thin layer of skin; and stags do not turn old once their horns are cast off. Our pleasures fly of their own accord; pluck the flower which, unplucked, will wither away in ugliness.

Ovid does not always joke; he too is familiar with the *lacrima*

rerum.

Like Propertius in his elegies, Ovid draws a great deal on mythology in the *Ars Amatoria*. If, however, Propertius' mythological *exempla* often seem gratuitous and excessive, in the *Ars Amatoria* they are an integral part of the poem. At times they are used for purely comic effect Thus, for example, when the narrator speaks about women's hairdos and clothing, he boldly asserts that Laodamia had an oval face and therefore parted her hair in the middle (III, 137-138) (presumably for Protesilaus' delectation). Briseis had the good taste to set off her white skin with a dark dress when abducted by Achilles; dark-skinned Andromeda wore a white dress when she captivated Perseus (III, 190-192). Mythology becomes fashion statement; it is hard not to laugh.

At times it is the disparity between the mythological illustration and the purpose to which it is put that appeals to the reader's sense of the ridiculous. In Book I, for example, the poet calls on Liber/Bacchus, and proceeds to give a lengthy account of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus and her subsequent rescue by the god and his thiasos (525-564). The reader is led to expect that he may now hear about the pleasures of wine, or, perhaps, about happy outcomes in love unions. But this is not to be. These are the verses which immediately follow the Bacchus/Ariadne episode:

> ergo ubi contingerint positi tibi munera Bacchi
> atque erit in socii femina parte tori,
> nycteliumque patrem nocturnaque sacra precare
> ne iubeant capiti vina nocere tuo. (565-569)

> Therefore, when the gifts of Bacchus are put before you, and a woman shares your couch, pray to the father of the night and to all holy nocturnal spirits not to allow the wine to hurt your head.

From the sublime to the ridiculous, the lengthy and moving story of the rescue of Ariadne has led up to nothing but a warning about headache as a result of drinking too much.

And yet, often Ovid's use of mythological apparatus is more complex and subtle, As E.D. Blodgett has pointed out, its effect is often ambiguous. His mythological illustrations are at times more closely linked to tragedy than comedy, as, for example, in the case of the stories of Daedalus and Icarus (II, 21-96), and of Procris and Cephalus (III, 687-746). In Blodgett's words: "When one considers the design of the major illustrative episodes, it should become increasingly clear that Ovid's comic Muse capably wears a tragic mask."[31]

Thus mythological characters take their place on the stage of the *Ars Amatoria*. The effect is curious. The stage backdrop represents Rome; a part of the performers wear contemporary Roman garb, while others move about wearing the splendid accoutrements of gods and heroes or the diaphanous garb of nymphs. The *Ars Amatoria*, read as stage performance, is a fantastic masque in which the real, the possible, and the improbable all blend together. It is precisely the effect produced by the Campanian paintings, discussed earlier in this chapter, which depict fantastic stage settings on which human beings mingle with beings from the realms of myth. The visual art of these paintings, and the literary art of Ovid in the

poems discussed here seem to derive from the same aesthetic, one which plays with blurring the distinctions between art, theatre, and reality, anticipating, as Blodgett has pointed out, the Baroque vision by centuries.[32]

The *Remedia Amoris*: Exeunt Omnes.

The *Remedia Amoris* is the logical sequel to both the *Amores* and its didactic companion-piece, the *Ars Amatoria*. The drama being acted out in the Theatre of Love may well grow tedious after a certain point; the actors may wish to end the performance. Thus Ovid has written a coda to the play about *amor* that he has created in the previous two works.

The *Remedia Amoris* is, like the *Ars Amatoria*, a didactic poem, but much shorter, consisting of only 814 lines of verse. After all, the matter of ending *amor* is a far less complex issue than the vast subject of *amor* as an art form. The tone of the work is as urbane and witty as that of the *Amores* and the *Ars*; once again, Ovid's narrator, the "I" of the poem (he does not name himself "Naso" here) plays the part of the sophisticated teacher of love. The poem is nominally addressed to the male sex; but here too Ovid is an egalitarian. The narrator makes it clear that his advice holds good for women also:

> sed quaecumque viris, vobis quoque dicta puellae
> credite; diversis partibus arma damus.
> e quibus ad vestros siquid non pertinet usus
> attamen exemplo multo docere potest. (49-52)

But whatever is said to men, trust that it is also meant for you, girls; we give arms to both sides. And if something does not pertain to you, it can nonetheless teach you through many an example.

The narrator/teacher's advice on how to end the performance of *amor* is simple and easily summarized. The work would, in fact, be a great deal shorter, if it were not for Ovid's tongue-in-cheek piling up of multitudinous mythological *exempla* to underscore his arguments. In this work, Ovid's use of ponderous mythological machinery seems to be another in-joke designed for the benefit of his sophisticated circles: perhaps a good-humored parody of Propertius' favorite method of embellishing his poetry (see Chapter 3).

That Ovid may be making a reference to Propertius' elegies for the benefit of his urbane audience is also suggested by the following direct allusion to the first line of the first poem in Propertius' *monobiblos*. Propertius' image of the abject male lover, lying on the ground as Amor presses his feet on the unfortunate's neck, is echoed in the first poem of the *Remedia*. In line 4, the teacher/narrator says: caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus (Love pressed me down, with his feet placed upon my head). This image is, furthermore, repeated at the end of the poem, and thus underscored, lest the reader miss the allusion:

> mollior es, neque abire potes vinctusque teneris
> et tua saevus amor sub pede colla premit.

You are weaker, and you cannot get away, and you are held in chains; and does cruel *Amor* press your neck beneath his feet?

The repeated allusion hardly seems accidental on Ovid's part; perhaps a subtle tribute to his predecessor in the elegiac genre.

The precepts for ending a sexual relationship which the teacher/narrator adduces are simple and succinct. Above all: avoid the life of leisure which gives you time to play the part of a lover, and keep busy with productive activities: otia si tollas periere Cupidinis arcus (take away leisure, and the bow of Cupid perishes, 139). The teacher/narrator urges the male lover to take up productive activities in the real world, which until now, has hardly made its presence felt in Ovid's Theatre of Love. In turn, he suggests the practice of law (150-152); a military career; and farming (169-196). In the latter passage Ovid paints a lengthy idealized picture of bucolic life, perhaps with an urban dweller's genuine nostalgia for the simple life. The teacher also recommends the pursuits of hunting, fowling and fishing as suitable rustic pursuits, lest one think about sexual entanglements while in the country (197-210).

Absence from Rome is ideal; but, should this be impossible, psychological warfare may be employed. The actor wishing to abandon the performance can harp on the faults and flaws of his partner (315-322); he can force her into settings where she is displayed to her worst advantage (325-348). By alluding to himself, Ovid is making another clever in-joke: here he is subverting everything that his teacher/narrator has

taught in Book III of the *Ars Amatoria*. And yet, even though clever psychological tactics may be employed to end a liaison so that the performance of love may be brought to its close, the teacher/narator urges the male lover to avoid recriminations as the play of love comes to its end. The final scenes are not to be tragic; we are, rather, in the world of a sophisticated comedy of manners:

> fallat et in tenues evanidus exeat aures,
> perque gradus molles emoriatur amor;
> sed modo dilectam scelus est odisse puellam
> exitus ingeniis convenit iste feris. (653-656)

Let love fail; and once it has vanished, let it disappear into thin air; and let it die out by slow degrees. But it is only nasty to hate the girl you once loved; such an ending is fit for uncivilized minds.

To paraphrase T.S. Eliot, the relationship is to end with a whimper, not a bang.

The *Remedia Amoris* is nothing but an amusing postscript to Ovid's Theatre of Love; and Ovid cannot help ending it with yet another reductive joke: he urges his reader not to bother reading love poetry, precisely what he has been engaged in doing. The *teneri poetae* (757) are to be avoided at all costs. In his cautionary note to the reader, Ovid mentions all the poets that he admires and values: not only the Hellenistic masters Callimachus and Philetas (760), but also the Roman love elegists Tibullus (763), Propertius (764), and Gallus (765). The climax of the joke comes when Ovid urges the reader not to read his own work--which the reader is in the process of finishing.

Just how trivial the entire performance based on *amor* has been is hammered in by the last lines of the *Remedia*. The last bit of advice which the teacher/narrator gives to the male lover is to watch his diet (715-810): love can be cured by the proper food--the ultimate absurdity. At the end of the *Remedia Amoris* we have come a long way indeed from Lucretius' vision of *amor* as a violent and destructive *furor* which ensnares a man, eats away at the very marrow of his bones, and wounds him to the depths of his being.

Conclusion: Performance and Meaning.

One of the functions of theatre is quite simply to entertain its audience. There is no doubt that Ovid does so admirably. There is also no doubt that the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris* are immortal works, as they speak vividly to present-day readers; nothing has changed in the Theatre of Love over the centuries. Popular magazines give expert advice on how to display oneself--whether male or female--to best advantage in order to attract the opposite sex; journals speak of successful "make-overs;" talk-shows, syndicated columns, and entire books suggest how to meet people, how to enter relationships, how to prolong them or end them. Ovid spoke of all these things centuries ago, and with more grace, wit, humor, and sheer good fun.

And yet, paradoxically, the reader may come away from

Ovid's Theatre of Love a bit saddened, perhaps a bit depressed. When the Theatre of Love has been played out, one wonders if that is all there is, and no more. Ovid has dealt with *amor* as performance art, but never with love itself, that almost undefinable relationship which may link two individuals. Love does not, in effect, exist in the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*. As Myerowitz points out, "There are no 'meaningful relationships'. Mutuality between lovers exists only insofar as there is complicity or play."[33] It is this emptiness which may disturb us as readers.

As in the case of the other poets discussed in this paper, we are, of course, not dealing with the historical P. Ovidius Naso's erotic psychology, but rather with what his narrator-persona says in his poetry; the two do not equal each other. Ovid the man may well have experienced love deeply; it is just that he chooses not to write about it, while his art is another matter entirely. The reader can be dazzled by the cleverness, urbanity, and wit of the three *amor* poems; yet the palpable absence of love from Ovid's Theatre of Love leads one to wonder whether the whole performance is not, after all, to use Blodgett's apt phrase,[34] merely a well-wrought void.

1. Ovid, *The Art of Love and other Poems*, trans. J.H. Mozley (LOndon and Cambridge, 1929), p. VIII.

2. Molly Myerowitz, *The Game of Love* (Detroit, 1985).

3. Suetonius II, *Divus Augustus*, 99.

4. See Chapter 2, p. 17.

5. This is not surprising in view of the fact that Pompeii, a relatively small provincial town, could support two theatres, a lage and a small one. Theatre was clearly an integral part of the cultural life of Pompeii.

6. See Maiuri, p. 95.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 92. The plate, however, does not show the entire painting, only the greater part of it.

10. See Curtius, p. 273.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

13. See Schefold, *Vergessenes Pompeji*, pl. 78 and 79.

14. *Ibid.*, pl. 4, p. 57.

15. *Ibid.*, pl. 6.

16. See Chapter 3, endnote 62. Pallotino points out that it is commonly thought that the winged figure represented here is thought to be a "genius" of death; he points out that the scene depicted actually represents Iphigeneia being carried to the altar of her sacrifice. Pallotino, p. 34.

17. Curtius, p. 189.

18. Schefold, *Vergessenes Pompeji*, pl. 149, 2.

19. *Ibid.*, pl. 99.

20. This was my initial personal reaction when I first started to study Campanian wall painting. I have, however seen this reaction in most beginning students of Roman art.

21. Schefold, *Vergessenes Pompeji*, pl. 1.

22. See, for example, Pallotino, p. 33.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 116

24. For example, I-9 is a discourse on the lover as soldier; II-4, a confession of the narrator's inability to confine his love to a single woman; III-2, an account of a prophetic dream.

25. Thus, for example, In Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the cast includes Musica, Speranza, and Spiriti.

26. It is this brief scene, taken literally by numerous scholars, among them Lilja, (see Biblliography) that seems to have perpetuated the legend that Tibullus' poems were accurate accounts of his erotic relationships, and that Delia and Nemesis were real women. We are here, however, in the realm of pure fantasy.

27. See the discussion of the importance of *cultus* in Myerowitz, Ch. 2.

28. See *Amores*, I-15.

29. J.H. Mozley, the Loeb edition translator of the *Ars Amatoria*, gives an invaluable explication of Ovid's geographical guide in the footnotes to his translation. The poet's references to specific locations Rome are at times not comprehensible to the reader who has little knowledge of Roman archaeology of this period. See J.H. Mozley, trans., *The Art of Love and Other Poems* (London and Cambridge), 1969.

30. Mozley points out that Augustus staged a recreation of the Battle of Salamis on a lake excavated at the foot of the Janiculum.

31. E.D. Blodgett. "The Well-Wrought Void: Reflections on the *Ars Amatoria*, *Classical Journal* 68 (1973), p. 326.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

33. Myerowitz, p. 29.

34. This phrase constitutes part of the title of Blodgett's essay cited above.

CONCLUSION

> Here is a place of disaffection
> Time before and time after.
>
> T.S. Eliot

Research projects can at times lead to unexpected discoveries. Thus my M.A. thesis, which served as the initial impetus for this project, began as a study of Catullus' portrayal of Ariadne, the female protagonist of *carmen* 64; I initially set out to analyze and describe the misogynistic attitude which I believed the poet exhibited towards the fictional woman created by him. I came to see, however, that Catullus' treatment of his male protagonist, Theseus, was far more dismissive, even denigratory, than that of Ariadne. I had to conclude that the poet's attitude towards the characters in this long poem, male and female, was more complex than I had first perceived. I came to see *carmen* 64 not as an exercise in misogyny, but rather as a pessimistic comment on the failure of human relationships, especially those between men and women.

In the present research project I had initially intended to expand upon my work on *carmen* 64 by examining the poetry of other contemporary and near-contemporary elegists, in order to determine whether something similar to what I saw in poem 64 could be detected in their work. The fundamental question which I posed myself was the following: Was Catullus' pessimistic attitude toward gender relationships unique to his poetry, possibly stemming from personal experience, or was it

a more widely-spread phenomenon, reflected in other poetic production of the era? To make the present project feasible, I intended to confine it to three areas: first, a further investigation of Catullus' other poetry; second, an analysis of Propertius' relationship with his fictional mistress Cynthia; and third, a close reading of Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*. It was to be comparative study of love relationships in three important but highly diverse poets who wrote during the period of the late Republic and early Empire.

This project, however, has--evidently--evolved into something quite different. I have strayed, to begin with, in Chapter 1 outside of the field of elegy into that of didactic poetry: the *De Rerum Natura*, a unique and successful rendering into verse of Epicurus' system of natural philosophy by Catullus' contemporary Lucretius. It is the two contrasting passages about the nature of Venus/sexuality from Books I and IV that represent the pivotal point of my study. Furthermore, a stray intuitive perception of the similarity of Lucretius' highly visual rendering of his Invocation to Venus and the well-known painting by Sandro Botticelli known as the *Primavera* led me to a new focus for this project, originally intended as a literary investigation: namely an effort to link poetry and visual art.

Aside from a minimal training in art history gained from undergraduate courses and from working for a number of years in the Cleveland Museum of Art, I had little knowledge, and a

great deal of ignorance, about Renaissance culture and specifically Renaissance painting. Indeed, a whole new perspective on the relationship of ancient culture to the Renaissance has been opened to me as a result of my decision to investigate the relationship of Lucretius and Botticelli. I stand thoroughly in awe of the amazing breadth of learning of Edgar Wind and Charles Dempsey (see Bibliography) in particular in their analyses of the ancient sources of Renaissance thought and visual art. What I wish to stress is that I lay no claim to original work in this complex field; I merely have dared to use the *Primavera*, as well as another painting by Botticelli, the *Venus and Mars*, not only to elucidate the highly visual nature of Lucretius' Invocation, but also to suggest that great original artists working in diverse fields may influence each other, even after a lapse of centuries.

My main reason, however, for discussing the visually and verbally beautiful Invocation, which casts Venus as a glorious life-enhancing force that causes all living beings to perpetuate their species, was to contrast it with Lucretius' dark vision of human love and sexuality in Book IV examined in detail in the rest of Chapter 1. The contrast between the two passages is so extreme that it is shocking. It is possible that Lucretius' savage denunciation of women--so out of tune with the rest of the *De Rerum Natura* represents some form of temporary personal psychopathology. It is, however, clear

that the reduction of love between men and women to a physiological need for copulation--mechanical sex--shows forth a deeply pessimistic attitude about the very possibility of satisfactory relationships, except on the most primitive animal level, between the two genders.

It is the darkness of Lucretius' vision of sexual relationships in Book IV that led me to examine, in Chapter 2, what is perhaps Catullus' darkest and most disturbing work, *carmen* 63, the so-called Attis poem: an account of a young man's self-castration, a disturbing subject in itself. One cannot help wondering what caused Catullus to write what is evidently an original re-interpretation of the Cybele-Attis myth, the permutations of which have been traced in this chapter. The poem may well have had its source in cultural reality: the Phrygian goddess Cybele, legitimately worshipped in Rome as Magna Mater, was served during Catullus' lifetime by self-castrated foreign eunuch priests. Their possibly disturbing un-gendered presence in Rome may well have inspired the poem; yet Catullus chose to re-cast the story of Attis, traditionally perhaps a seasonally dying vegetation-god and the consort of Cybele, as the personal tragedy of a Greek youth. After the irrevocable act of self-castration, he comes to recognize, with horror, what he had done.

On one level this retelling of the Attis myth can be read as a sophisticated exploration of the concept of gender. Catullus seems to be playing, perhaps with more than a touch

of black humor, with the definition of identity, as Attis' gender shifts repeatedly from the masculine to the feminine. Catullus seems to be asking whether a human being can be defined by the nature of his genitalia alone.

Yet *carmen* 63 goes beyond the exploration of gender. Catullus' Attis, having given up his masculinity, and deeply regretting his act, does not even have the consolation of merging with, or being loved or even honored by the goddess whom he has sought and to whom he has voluntarily sacrificed his manhood. Catullus casts Cybele as a fearful *domina*, who shows no love, or even kindness, for the now ungendered Attis; at the end of the poem she reduces him to her unwilling handmaiden. There is no suggestion in the poem that the now female Attis will ever be favored by Cybele; his sacrifice to the indifferent divinity may have been pointless. The waste is tragic.

If, indeed, the relationship of Attis and Cybele represents a metaphor for a male-female love relationship, Catullus' vision is a bleak one: that of a male victimized by and subservient to a powerful but cold female. Thus, while the subtle and complex play with gender in poem 63 is very different indeed from Lucretius' overt savaging of women and of love, its pessimistic vision is ultimately at least as dark. If for Lucretius love is nothing but an agonized sex-drive, for Catullus it is a destructive victimization of man at the hands of woman.

It is not surprising that Catullus' unique and shocking poem 63 had, as far as it is known, no direct influence on subsequent literary production. Yet the investigation of contemporary visual art suggests that Catullus' portrayal of Attis as a strange double-gendered creature may well have influenced a certain taste in decorative artifacts, given the existence of a number of luxury household objects, such as statuettes, table legs and lamps, representing Attis and stressing his ambiguous femininity, unearthed at Pompeii. Certainly these do not represent high art; and yet their presence in well-to-do homes, not long after Catullus' death, suggests a popular fascination with gender anomalies, possibly influenced some degree by Catullus' disturbing explorations in carmen 63.

That both Lucretius and Catullus, almost exact contemporaries, may have been affected in their pessimistic perception of love and sexuality by the extremely turbulent and unsettled social conditions of their time, living as they did the last years of the crumbling Republic. Their pessimism about love may well have been rooted in a deeper pessimism about life itself, surrounded as they were by constant reminders that human life was cheap, and society itself seemed to have lost its very foundations. What is perhaps more surprising is that their dark vision repeats itself in the poetry of both Propertius and Ovid, both of whom lived and wrote under the far more stable conditions of a society st in

order by the first emperor Augustus, whatever his drawbacks and failings as a ruler.

Propertius' cycle of Cynthia poems, which I discuss in Chapter 3, is an account of the poet's (or his narrator's) lengthy and complex affair with a cultivated, willful and strong woman. The relationship of the narrator/male lover with his mistress is a curious one: the narrator casts himself throughout almost all the poems as an angry victim. There are very few happy, or even sexually satisfactory moments that take place between Propertius' narrator and his mistress. A careful reading of the poems gives the reader an overwhelming sense of the male lover's protracted torment and utter misery; yet he seems to glory in his masochism. Curiously, the relationship between Propertius' narrator and Cynthia present an unexpected parallel to the relationship of Catullus' Attis and Cybele: the woman acts as a harsh, unfeeling *domina* to her submissive male lover, who stands to lose everything in the relationship. It can, of course be argued, that Propertius may not be entirely serious much of the time, and that he is merely playing a gallant literary game, as Paul Veyne has suggested (see Chapter 3) in a sophisticated Roman demi-monde. Nonetheless, the poet seems to feel the need to put the male lover into an utterly abject position. Whether serious or not, the stance of the poet suggests a lopsided love relationship between Cynthia and Propertius, the male and female characters he has created.

Propertius' Cynthia cycle hinges on the pain of the male lover. The reader's journey through the poems is, at best, an uncomfortable one; one feels like an intruder into the private sphere of anger and frustration of Peropertius' narrator. In Propertius' poetry, love is clearly not a desperate sexual need, as in Lucretius Book IV, but seems, rather, to suggest something more convoluted, even twisted--but the dark vision of male-female relationships which I have tried to uncover in the work of Lucretius and Catullus still exists here.

A careful reader of Propertius is bound to be struck by the vivid visual tableaux which appear in his poetry; it is clear that the poet had an interest in visual art and specifically painting, as it has been pointed out in this chapter. I have attempted, in this chapter, to go a step beyond identifying and analyzing such tableaux; I have tried to connect certain stylistic traits which appear in Propertius' poetry with stylistic traits of Second Style and Third Style Campanian Painting, which chronologically roughly correspond to Propertius' poetic career. Although such a linkage of stylistic traits from two separate realms of art, in this case literary and visual, is of necessity theoretical, I believe that in the case of Propertius' poetry, and some Campanian paintings, evidence of a similar aesthetic, or at least a similar artistic sensibility, can be detected, as I have attempted to show in this chapter.

The clever, amusing and worldly *amor* poems by Ovid,

discussed in my last chapter, seem at first to be a far cry indeed from the much darker works of Lucretius, Catullus, and Propertius. For Ovid, *amor* certainly represents no dark passion, no frustrated vision of male-female relationships. The word *amor*, as it appears in Ovid, does not carry the meaning of love in the terms that we as twentieth-century post-Romantics may in broad terms define it. As I have tried to show, it represents, rather, a sophisticated sexual liaison between two (or more) consenting individuals who know precisely what they are doing; amor is not love at all, in the conventional sense of the term, but rather a finely-honed performance art.

I have thus in my last chapter read the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris* as theatrical performance, and have attempted to connect the sensibility revealed in these poems with the sense of theatricality that seems to pervade the entire society in which Ovid lived and composed his works. The sense that all the world may be a stage, and all life a stage performance, certainly seems to be suggested by the visual art of Campania, with its numerous representations of scenes connected with theatrical performance, as well as of stage settings ranging from relatively realistic ones to fantastic and highly stylized ones, almost bizarre in their effect on the viewer. It seems significant that the motif of the theatrical mask--in and out of visual context--is ubiquitous in both wall paintings and

mosaics; perhaps a constant reminder of the theatricality of life.

I have suggested, then, that in Ovid's poetry, love is a performance art; and indeed it may be a pleasurable one, as it often is in the works I have discussed. If, however, love amounts only to a stage performance, does it not conceal a void, a nullity: the non-existence of actual love? If so, Ovid's seemingly-lighthearted poetry conceals a vision of male-female relationships which may be darker than even that of the three poets discussed in the earlier three chapters. For them, love consists in sexual and mental torment; for Ovid, it does not even exist.

We have come full circle from Lucretius' tormented vision of sexuality to Ovid's sophisticated nullity. The dark vision of male-female relationships seen in the two Republican poets, Lucretius and Catullus, has not disappeared from the work of the two Augustan poets, but merely shifted its shape. This vision seems to transcend the four poets, whose individual sensibilities and practices of the poetic art yet are highly different. We cannot, of course, begin to understand and explain them as individuals, or even to speculate intelligently about why this dark streak of pessimism about the relationship between genders exists in their poetry; the culture in which we live is perhaps too far removed from theirs for us to ever understand them. And yet the fact remains that they all felt compelled to explore and express

this dark streak in their art: this is what links them together, diverse as their poetry is.

It is, of course, impossible to say why this dark vision should pervade the literary imagination of an era. It seems, however, that the pessimism about male-female relationships which is found in the work of all four poets--Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius, Ovid--discussed in this project may have had a curious effect on subsequent literary production. Love poetry as such seems to die out in the Roman context; is it because after the dark pessimism about love, expressed with such skill by these four highly diverse poets, one could not write credible love poetry again? I leave this as an open-ended question for the reader to speculate upon.

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